

A/N The obligatory author's note. I own none of the rights, nor make money, nor gain fame, glamor, or anything else but a lack of sleep from the Harry Potter universe. All parts of this story marked with "- -" are largely quoted from Rowland, J. K., Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire. However, material has been edited and changed to fit this fanfic.

Also, please note that this story is AU, with character death and an emerging Dark(er)!Harry who is finding the balance between love and hate, vengeance and murder; all tied together within his anger. Yet, he must learn to balance it with love, or even let go of it. Last, this story is rated T, but will be somewhat violent in nature. If you feel it should be rated M as it continues, please let me know.

## PART I

### THE CRUCIBLE

#### CHAPTER ONE

##### MAZES AND RESURRECTIONS

"How is Gabrielle doing?" Harry asked Fleur, just before the start of the third task. He turned away from the stands where the Weasley family sat, minus Charlie who was back in Romania, to look at her. Gabrielle had come down very ill earlier in the day.

The polite applause after the announcement of the Champions was fading out as Fleur shrugged her shoulders. "Not so well. They're taking 'er 'ome now."

"Why? What's wrong with her?" Genuine concern shadowed Harry's face.

Fleur caught the small hint of 'big brother' concern and smiled at the idea of the young boy acting as a protector. "I'd be careful next time I saw 'er 'arry, no? 'Er Veela 'eritage is beginning to emerge. Zhe first few days are zhe most painful. Many changes 'appen. Be very careful zhe next time she sees you! My sister likes you."

Harry watched as she continued to smile at him much like an adult would smile at a child and felt a spark of indignation. It reminded him

of what she thought about him that night after being chosen by the Goblet of Fire.

"Zhey are saying zhat zhis leetle boy is to compete also!"

"Little boy," he whispered to himself.

"Pardon moi?"

Harry shook his head, then looked towards the ground.

"Don't worry 'Arry, I'll protect you."

The spark of indignation caught and roared into a fire. He had made it through two tasks already and moreover, fought off Voldemort twice in four years. Why did she think he needed help tonight?

"From my sister, 'Arry. I was only joking."

"Oh," he said, and became quite fascinated with his feet.

"IT IS TIME!" Bagman's voice echoed throughout the stadium.

-"On my whistle, Harry and Cedric!" said Bagman. "Three - two - one -"

He gave a short blast on his whistle, and Harry and Cedric hurried forward into the maze.

The towering hedges cast black shadows across the path, and, whether because they were so tall and thick or because they had been enchanted, the sound of the surrounding crowd was silenced the moment they entered the maze. Harry felt almost as though he were underwater again. He pulled out his wand, muttered, "Lumos," and heard Cedric do the same just behind him.

After about fifty yards, they reached a fork. They looked at each other.

"See you," Harry said, and he took the left one, while Cedric took the right.

Harry heard Bagman's whistle for the second time. Krum had entered the maze. Harry sped up. His chosen path seemed completely deserted. He turned right, and hurried on, holding his wand high over his head, trying to see as far ahead as possible. Still, there was nothing in sight.

Bagman's whistle blew in the distance for the third time. All of the champions were now inside.-

Harry's path led him further than he wanted to go, passing the center by twenty yards or more. He took the next right and tried to loop around, hoping to find an opening that would let him into what he thought was the inner-part of the maze.

Finally, after ten minutes and whispering "point me" more times than he could count, Harry came to an opening on his left and stepped through, facing another set of hedges as he tried to determine the best way. The hedges magically thinned out before him and he saw into the next path, and through that into another one. There, the hedges were thicker, taller. The cup was just beyond them.

In the back of Harry's mind, a warning flashed. There was no way he should have been able to get this close to the cup without encountering much of anything. The Boggart and sphinx weren't a threat. But he was too intent on reaching the cup to hear the warning.

Turning to his left again, he ran up a path and was about to make a right when he heard Cedric yelling.

There wasn't a moment's hesitation. Harry continued up the path and then turned right, running towards Cedric's voice. Now it sounded like he passed it. Harry backtracked a few yards and decided to go straight through the hedge. "Diffindo."

A few small branches and leaves fell to the ground, but the hole wasn't big enough for Harry to step through.

"Expulso!" he commanded. The hedge took the impact of the curse, opening a larger hole, but it still wasn't big enough. It took Harry two more attempts before he was able to step through. Then he heard Cedric yelling again.

Harry ran down another path and turn left. He found Cedric, lying on the ground, a Porlock at his feet. The shaggy, three-foot tall, cloven hoofed creature stared down at the Champion on the ground, waiting.

Cedric shook his head and tried to sit up, but the Porlock opened its mouth, emitting a sound that Harry could barely hear. Cedric screamed, turned white, and fell back to the ground.

"Stupefy!" Harry's spell hit the Porlock and deflected off without any noticeable effect.

"Flipendo!" Again, there was no effect.

Cedric stirred, then raised his head. The Porlock opened its mouth in response.

"Incarcerous!" Harry cried, desperate to do something. The ropes wrapped tightly around the Porlock, covering its body and mouth, muffling whatever sound it was making. Harry stepped closer and reached down to help Cedric up, then pushed him beyond the creature.

"What was that?" Harry asked as they ran down the path.

"I'd kiss a Skrewt if you could tell me," Cedric answered. "All I know is it's called a Porlock, saw a picture of it once. Every time it'd make that noise my entire body felt like it was being torn apart."

They turned a corner, then another corner, losing themselves in the maze.

Finally Harry stopped. "If it did what you said it did, you know what it sounds like, don't you?"

"I have an idea. What are you thinking?"

"The Cruciatus curse."

"Yeah," Cedric answered, adjusting his robes and wiping off the dirt. "But I've never heard of the Cruciatus knocking people out. It's more like the Cruciatus is a copy of that thing."

The way Cedric phrased his comment connected the dots for Harry, and raised all types of worries and warnings in his head. This time, Harry couldn't ignore them. He inspected his wand, not wanting to meet Cedric's eyes. "I. . . I think something's not right."

"What are you gobbing on about?"

"How many creatures and impediments have you come up against?"

Cedric took a couple seconds to count. "I'd have to say, six or so. It's about what I—"

"A Boggart and a riddle from a Sphinx," said Harry. "Outside of that, I've had none."

The two boys looked at each other silently, the task forgotten.

Cedric broke the silence after a few moments. "Probably half the creatures were dark. It surprised me the first couple times."

"My only surprise was the hedges thinning so I could see the inner hedge around the table the cup is on. Why would you have it so hard, and I so easy?"

Cedric took a deep breath, coming to terms with the situation. "You didn't put your name in the Goblet, did you?" he finally asked.

"No."

Cedric shook his head. "You've had to spend the whole year looking behind your back, again."

"I glad you finally understand that," Harry said a bit sarcastically.

"I guess I deserved that."

"Yeah, well, maybe next time someone will believe me."

"I guess I deserved that too," said Cedric as he looked up and down the path they were on.

Finally, he turned back to Harry. "I don't like the fact that someone is manipulating this task."

"Neither do I."

"I just want to clarify, with all these dark creatures and you not putting your name in the Goblet, you know you're the target, right?"

Harry couldn't help but smile. "Some things never change."

"Oh, but they do," Cedric replied. "They set you up so this time, Weasley and Granger aren't with you." He turned thoughtful for a second before continuing. "That leaves me. Let's get through this together and get you out safely."

Harry was about to protest when Cedric stopped him. "Harry, nothing's a secret at this school. I know you killed a Basilisk, faced down He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named twice, saved the youngest Weasley's life and even, if the rumor is true, one Hippogriff named Buckbeak; but you didn't do any of it on your own."

"How did you know about Buck—"

"So you did save Buckbeak!"

"Yeah but—"

"That one was as much a guess as knowledge, but you and the Weasleys aren't the only ones who have access to secrets around here."

Harry grunted his amusement, then changed the subject back to the task they were supposed to be finishing. "I really could care less about winning this tournament."

"Right now, I think I care more about living," Cedric agreed. "The way I see it, two wands are better than one."

Harry thought back over the last few years and couldn't help but agree. "Fine, but if we find the cup, you can take it. I just want it to be over."

Cedric chuckled. "We'll argue about that if we find the cup."

They walked back up the path, tracing their steps. Harry led, pointing his wand and illuminating the way. It seemed but a few minutes later they heard Fleur screaming.

The two young wizards raced to the end of their path. They could only go left or right, but Fleur was on the other side of the hedge directly in front of them. Harry leveled his wand. When he was finished making a hole in the hedge, he jumped through it to find Fleur levitating four feet in the air. A spell had laid dormant on the ground, waiting for someone to walk over it.

Harry reached out to take her hand, but a nasty shock lit up his body and hurtled him backwards.

Cedric pointed his wand at Fleur. "Finite Incantatem." She dropped unceremoniously to the ground with a thud.

Harry picked himself up off the ground as Cedric knelt down to check on the Beaxbatons Champion.

"C'est quoi, ce bordel?"

"Par-dohn?" Harry asked. It was the only French he knew.

"What just 'appened?" Fleur interpreted her earlier question.

"I think the more important question is," Cedric began, looking at Harry, "how many things like this have you come across?"

"Six, at least. Why do you ask? You 'ave 'ad zhe same, no?"

"No, I haven't," Harry answered in a small voice. He was sick to his stomach at the thought of the three Champions enduring the dark spells and creatures on his account. "I haven't come across anything worse than a Boggart on my own, and I walked through this very spot fifteen minutes ago."

"What is the meaning of zhis?" Fleur looked from Harry to Cedric, then back to Harry.

"It means we stick together," said Cedric. "I think someone is trying to get Harry to the middle of the maze for some reason, and with the

number of dark creatures I've seen, I doubt it's so he can get another article in The Daily Prophet."

Harry shot Cedric a dirty look, but Cedric winked back, reminding Harry of Sirius for some reason.

"Arry, you said you were just 'ere?"

"About fifteen minutes ago."

"But who would be after you? You're just—"

"A leetle boy?" Harry spat out at her in frustration, mocking her accent. He walked to the end of the path and waited for Cedric.

"But 'e is!" said Fleur, little confused and defensive.

"I would never call him that," he contradicted. "That 'little boy' has gone up against more dark magic his first two years here than half the wizarding world did during the war with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Harry's pulled off some amazing feats. Your sister was the second life he saved in the last two years, though that was quite easier than the first one."

Fleur's eyes narrowed. "Stop teasing, Cedric. I know 'e saved my sister. But. . ." Her voice faded out as she saw that he was completely serious.

"And you were there, no?" she asked, raising an eyebrow.

"No, I wasn't, but—"

"Zhen anything could 'ave 'appened. After zhe lake, I believe 'Arry would risk 'imself for anyone, but stories get carried away sometimes, do they not?"

"No. Not with Harry, he downplays just about everything." Cedric looked down the path towards Harry. "Walk with me."

Harry watched as they walked up.

"Zhank you for helping me."



"It's not a big deal," he mumbled.

Fleur glanced at Cedric, noticing how little Harry thought of what he did. "I still zhank you. Cedric says zhat you've fought dark creatures before?"

Harry gave Cedric a "Why did you tell her" look that Fleur caught as well.

"It's okay 'Arry. I believe. So are zhey after you again?"

"I don't know." A thought flashed through Harry's mind to tell them about his dreams and scar hurting, but he dismissed it instantly. "All I know is that I didn't put my name in the Goblet last fall and now, the path is being cleared for me to get to the cup, while you all are dealing with dark spells and creatures that most definitely would not have been approved by Dumbledore."

"Neither would Madame Maxime, I zhink you are right. We must stay together and find zhe exit."

"No," said Cedric. It'll be blocked.

"Then let's find Krum." Harry ended the conversation and took the lead, but finding Krum wouldn't prove difficult.

Three minutes later, Krum turned a corner and raised his wand to curse the three of them, but fell to his knees instead.

Harry, Cedric, and Fleur all held their wands on him as they approached. They could hear him muttering at first, but it got louder.

"No, I vill not! I vill not be under the curse!" After a few more moments, Krum shouted out, "No! I vill not curse Fleur or Cedric!" The curse seemed to break and he fell to the ground, gasping for breath.

"Are you okay?" Cedric asked, his wand raised, now standing in front of Harry and Fleur.

"Ja, I vas under the Imperius curse, but I'm better now."

He gestured to the other two older Champions. "Someone was trying to get me to curse the two of you."

"We heard," Harry deadpanned.

Ten minutes later, all four Champions walked together through the rows of hedges. Harry was leading, since the maze seemed to respond to his presence.

After a few more turns, they stopped to discuss strategy when Fleur looked through a small gap, and saw the hedges of the next row parting to open up a pathway to the cup.

"I see it. There's the cup," she said excitedly.

Harry saw it too. They walked to the end of the path, made a right, doubled back, and then made a left. One more turn and they were standing in front of the cup.

"Who should take it?" wondered Fleur. "I don't think I want it now."

"Harry," Krum offered. "It would be a shock to those who thought they would catch him."

"No. We made it through together, we should take it together."

"I think that's a smashing good plan, Harry," Cedric chimed in.

Krum and Fleur both agreed. Working their way around the cup, each one of them took a position facing another. Harry ended up facing Fleur.

"Gabrielle will love that Harry is such a gentleman. I will have to work hard to protect you!"

In the moment before they touched the cup, their worries disappeared and they laughed, harder than they'd laughed all year. The tournament was finally over and they were safe.

"Ready?" asked Harry.

"One, two, three, reach!"

X O X O X O X

The darkness was overwhelming. Harry lay on the ground, barely able to see the Tri-Wizard cup as it sat on its side on the crest of the little hill they had unknowingly Portkeyed to. He remembered Fleur and Krum landing and disappearing down the incline. Hopefully they were okay.

"I didn't see that coming," Cedric mumbled at Harry's side.

"Neither did I." Harry lifted his head and looked around, but was too disoriented.

A voice, high and cold and straight out of Harry's nightmares greeted him.

"Welcome, little Harry Potter. I've been waiting for you to complete my return."

Harry flipped over and pushed himself off the ground, raising his wand to face Voldemort.

What he saw instead, was a bevy of Death Eaters standing between him and that . . . thing. Whatever it was, it wasn't human.

"Come now, let's not let such a thing as distaste in my appearance come between such old friends, shall we, Harry Potter? We have so much history together for one who was as young as you when we first met."

Harry instinctively circled away from the cup and the other three Champions, hoping they'd be smart enough to keep their heads down and not be spotted.

"Master," a small, frightened voice beckoned Voldemort. "It is done. The wards are down."

Harry thought hard about cursing Wormtail on the spot. He didn't care where wards were falling. Standing before him now, were the two beings most responsible for the death of his parents.

He seethed with rage.

"So much anger, little Harry Potter," chastised Voldemort with a mockery of paternal concern. "Be careful, or you might turn out. . . " - he paused, looking at all the Death Eaters standing around him, then grinned wickedly - ". . . like me."

Sycophant laughter filled the night.

"BIND HIM!" Voldemort cried out.

Before Harry knew what happened, he was hit with too many Incarcerous spells to count. He fell over and rolled down the slight incline of the graveyard two or three times before coming to a stop. He was close enough that Cedric could hear him if he whispered, but he had to make it fast, before anyone approached.

"Go, leave, slide down to the bottom of the hill. Don't stay here for this. Please."

Harry barely finished before he was picked up by a spell and thrown against a headstone.

"Don't you think it is appropriate, little Harry Potter, since you almost put me in the grave, that my resurrection should happen in a grave yard?"

Harry didn't give him the dignity of a response.

Voldemort let out a small, private laugh that was meant for only Harry and him. Then he turned to the closest Death Eater. "Lucius, I believe it is time. Take your sister-in-law and exact the purging you've been wishing for."

Bellatrix cackled with laughter, along with thirty other Death Eaters who had just been broken out of Azkaban earlier in the evening when the Dementors changed allegiances.

Harry noticed movement throughout the graveyard as Death Eaters turned on the spot and disappeared. A moment later, only ten Death Eaters remained. Two of them set about a cauldron that was boiling, stirring it and adding the finishing touches.

"My Lord, we are ready."

"After so many years, and to think, I have the pleasure of Harry Potter's blood to make it happen."

Harry struggled desperately to remove the ropes that bound him. Twice he could see one of the other Champions trying to reach him, but Harry shook his head each time. It would only tell Voldemort that there were more of them here. If he was to escape, he'd have to do it alone. He was not going to risk the lives of others.

He watched as Cedric now made his attempt to crawl to him. But Harry shook his head again. Cedric understood, but was not happy with the circumstances. He pulled himself over the crest and down the hill, leaving Harry alone.

A wand came level with Harry's eyes and a spell was cast. Harry gritted his teeth as a cut on his forearm opened up, much deeper than necessary. Blood flowed down his arm. The Death Eater caught it in a vial and walked over to the cauldron.

After another stir, a second Death Eater picked up the small, grotesque Voldemort, and lowered him into the cauldron. He hissed in pain as he touched the liquid. The first Death Eater waited until his master was fully immersed, then turned the vial upside down and poured the blood in.

The contents of the cauldron turned red, then began to froth and bubble violently. Distortions appeared everywhere Harry looked. The ground looked like a crumpled picture. The trees in the distance looked as though they had folded in on themselves. Harry felt a pressure as if the very fabric of the universe was twisting, pulling, threatening to snap in its transition into another reality. Then he realized, that is exactly what was happening.

Death had been cheated.

Voldemort rose, tall and strong. He levitated himself out of the cauldron and reached for his wand, which Wormtail handed to him.

"And now, Wormtail, for your reward."

A look of sheer joy and greed grew in Peter Pettigrew's eyes.

"Avada Kedavra."

Wormtail fell to the ground, dead.

"I have no use for those who would betray their best friends. They can't be trusted."

Harry looked on in absolute horror. He spared no feelings for Pettigrew, but was sickened by the ease with which Voldemort killed him.

"Now, what shall we do with you?" Voldemort asked Harry. He waved his wand and the ropes fell off. Harry stood up and moved back towards the spot where he'd been bound, hoping to pick up his wand.

He almost made it when Voldemort's wand moved. Harry's survivor instinct kicked in and he dove to the ground, fetching his own wand and shouting a curse at Voldemort, which was fended off.

"Impressive. But if you want to duel with me, little Harry Potter, then face me like a wizard and duel."

Harry stood up, but no sooner did he get to his feet then Voldemort hit him with the Cruciatus curse. When he ended it, Harry had just enough time to gain his breath before he was cursed again, and again, and again.

At the bottom of the hill, the other three Champions watched as the sky lit up with the curses, and cringed at the sound of Harry's voice rasping and growling, as he tried to keep from screaming.

"We must rescue him. I won't leave him to die."

"Oui, but how?"

"I have a plan," Cedric answered. "Spread out along this hill. On my signal, we rush to the top and engage from three different angles."

"That will probably get us all killed, but I can't think of anything else. Let's go get our fourth Champion."

Cedric smirked. "Fleur, I may have to take back everything I said about the French and their willingness to fight."

"Why?" she asked. "I'm Veela, not French." She laughed silently. Then stopped as another curse hit Harry. She glanced up and watched the rainbow of colors, hoping that she didn't see green.

"Alright, can the two of you apparate?"

"Oui."

"Ja."

"Good. Once we engage, I'll grab Harry and side-apparate him. But remember, we can't apparate into Hogwarts. Do you remember where the three of us met that first Hogsmeade weekend, on the road a little farther down from the gates? Apparate there."

"Sehr gut. I vill take the left side."

"Zen I will take zhe right side."

They spread out below the hill and on Cedric's signal, raced up it.

Krum, having spent his educational life in Durmstrang, had no issue concerning the use of a killing curse. Fleur, living in France and thus, under different laws, felt free to cast it as well. It was legal in wizarding France when faced with a mortal threat. Cedric was a Hufflepuff and Harry was in danger. Loyalty knows no bounds, laws be damned

The moment they could see over the hill, three Death Eaters to either side of Voldemort were dead before they hit the ground.

Cedric came up closest to Harry and took aim on a second Death Eater, but Voldemort had already cast his own curse. Cedric glowed green and fell back down the hill, eyes staring blankly at the night sky.

Harry raged, firing curse after curse. His magic was magnified, but Voldemort continued to deflect them as his Death Eaters tried to engage the younger, faster Champions.

Voldemort thought about the decision to send all but his worst fighters to accomplish the other task tonight. It bothered but a

moment. He wasn't afraid of being defeated. It just took time to properly mold a Death Eater and he had already lost one that may have been very helpful.

When two more were killed, Voldemort turned to cast the killing curse at Fleur.

Harry saw it before it happened. In that moment, something set loose inside of him and the first curse he could think of exploded from his wand.

"Crucio!"

Time slowed down as Harry watched his curse reach out and touch Voldemort, sending him to his knees. At the same moment, Harry realized two truths. One, when he really meant it, his spells were much, much more powerful; especially dark spells cast in hatred and anger. Two, as soon as this spell was over, Harry was going to die either instantly, or a very slow, painful death for these two seconds of victory.

Harry quickly cast another curse, hoping to avoid the second truth completely.

But Voldemort was too fast. He had already recovered and cast his own.

- A jet of green light issued from Voldemort's wand just as a jet of red light blasted from Harry's - they met in midair - and suddenly Harry's wand was vibrating as though an electric charge were surging through it; his hand seized up around it; he couldn't have released it if he'd wanted to - and a narrow beam of bright, deep gold light connected the two wands. Harry, following the beam with his astonished gaze, saw that Voldemort's long white fingers too were gripping a wand that was shaking and vibrating.

And then - nothing could have prepared Harry for this - he felt his feet lift from the ground. He and Voldemort were both being raised into the air, their wands still connected by that thread of shimmering golden light. They glided away from the tombstone and came to rest on a patch of ground that was clear and free of graves. The remaining five Death Eaters were shouting; asking Voldemort for



instructions; they were closing in, the snake slithering at their heels, some of them drawing their wands.

Krum and Fleur took advantage of their confusion, hitting two others with stunners. They could no longer cast killing curses, too many had been used and they both had drained their magical core.

The golden thread connecting Harry and Voldemort splintered; though the wands remained connected, a thousand more beams arced high over Harry and Voldemort, crisscrossing all around them, until they were enclosed in a golden, dome-shaped web, a cage of light.

Fleur watched, hoping for a little more time before she had to grab Harry and apparate. She was the one physically closest to him now, and as spent as her core was at the moment, she was afraid she'd splinch herself though somehow, she knew she wouldn't let Harry get splinched. She'd gladly take that pain for him if necessary, but just a little more time was all she needed to avoid it herself.

Harry held onto his wand more tightly, with both hands, and the golden thread remained unbroken. Then an unearthly and beautiful sound filled the air. It was coming from every thread of the light-spun web vibrating around Harry and Voldemort. It was a sound Harry recognized, though he had heard it only once before in his life: the phoenix song. It was almost as though a friend were speaking in his ear.

"Don't break the connection."

"I know, I know I mustn't"

"Votre bien-aimé fleur besoin de temps pour renforcer, Don't break the connection."

Harry had no clue what was said, except that he had to keep the connection. He didn't know why, and yet he did. Deep down, he knew that somehow, his soul depended on him keeping this connection. The thought took him by such surprise that not breaking the connection became much harder to do. Then his wand began to vibrate more powerfully than ever. . .and now the beam between him and Voldemort changed too. . .it was as though large beads of light were sliding up and down the thread connecting the wands - Harry

felt his wand give a shudder under his hand as the light beads began to slide slowly and steadily his way. The direction of the beam's movement was now toward him, from Voldemort, and he felt his wand shudder angrily.

As the closest bead of light moved nearer to Harry's wand tip, the wood beneath his fingers grew so hot he feared it would burst into flame. The closer that bead moved, the harder Harry's wand vibrated; he was sure his wand would not survive contact with it; it felt as though it was about to shatter under his fingers –

He concentrated every last thought on forcing the bead back toward Voldemort, his eyes furious, fixed, the phoenix song and foreign words he did not understand ringing in his ears - *Votre bien-aimé*—*Votre bien-aimé* - and slowly, very slowly, the beads quivered to a halt, and just as slowly, they began to move the other way, and it was Voldemort's wand that was vibrating extra-hard now, Voldemort who looked astonished, and almost fearful.

One of the beads of light was quivering, inches from the tip of Voldemort's wand. Harry didn't understand why he was doing it, didn't know what it might achieve, but he now concentrated as he had never done in his life, unaware that he was repeating the song and chant he had heard from the phoenix song, *Votre bien-aimé fleur*, but gaining strength and power from it, but also from the hatred and desire for violence that arose against whatever was threatening the song. Harry grew stronger, remembering that he had to mean it, remembering that his anger and hatred had empowered him before. The song faded out and the anger and hatred took over. With what felt like an explosion, Harry forced the bead of light to Voldemort's wand. It trembled for a moment. . .

"NOW!" the phoenix song cried one last time. Harry didn't think he could have held on for another moment anyway - he pulled his wand upward with an almighty wrench, and the golden thread broke; the cage of light vanished, the phoenix song died.-

The bead drove into Voldemort's wand and, as if hit by a dragon in full flight, he shot backwards over the heads of the Death Eaters.

Fleur and Krum both cast curses at the nearest Death Eaters, forcing them to break off from engaging Harry. Fleur ran, slamming

into Harry and turning in the air as they fell to the ground, hanging on to him as tightly as she could.

They appeared on the road just outside of Hogwarts. Fleur let go of Harry and caught herself as Harry tumbled to the ground.

She watched, unable to move, trying to make sense of the little boy she saw in front of her, the man who had just bettered the darkest wizard in two generations, in the most powerful dueling match she'd ever seen, heard, or read about.

But 'ow? She kept asking herself. I'm zhe Veela. Krum is zhe international star, but zhis boy from 'Ogwarts bested us all. . . she could not make sense of it.

Then she realized that Harry was still on the ground and leaned down to help him.

"Are you okay 'Arry?"

"Define, 'okay'."

"Ow about, breathing and able to move?."

"Vhat happened? Ist Harry injured?" Krum interrupted when he got to them, having apparated down the road twenty yards in case they apparated into a group of Death eaters.

Harry answered Fleur. "In that case, I'm sorta okay, though I feel like I was on the wrong end of Krum's Wronsky feint."

Krum laughed. "Harry Potter, as a friend ov mine vould say, you are a Mensch."

"I hope that's good. I think I'm too weak to argue with you otherwise." But he smiled at Krum.

Harry laid on the ground a couple more minutes, letting his body recover from the curses and exertion. Finally, when he felt strong enough, Fleur and Krum reached down and helped him to his feet. But halfway up Harry froze, his eyes fixed on the sky over Hogwarts.

"Arry, what's wrong?" Fleur asked, frightened as Harry's face drained of blood and his skin turned cold to her touch.

"No! NOO!" Harry screamed.

Fleur and Krum turned around and saw it too. Hovering over Hogwarts, was the Dark Mark.

A/N And thus the tale begins. I'm sure you have seen many hints and clues already in this chapter as to what is coming, some subtle, some not so subtle (Use google translator if you don't know the French phrase during the duel!)

As it sits, this story is looking to be between 12 to 18 chapters long. I have them mapped out and about a third of them written. So Please, if you liked this fic, PLEASE LEAVE A REVIEW! Matter of fact, I'll promise another chapter by Sunday if I get a decent number of reviews (that means I'll have to set some time aside for final edits, but I'll promise it).

## CHAPTER 2

### DARK NIGHTS

The ethereal mark lingered amongst the clouds; an apocalyptic image of Harry's world. He ran to the school, through the gates now lacking wards, and up the path that spilled out onto the vast lawns between the castle and the Quidditch pitch. Krum and Fleur followed, trying to keep up, but Harry paid them no mind, preparing for the black reality that lay ahead and remembering those responsible for what he was about to find; "Lucius, I believe it's time. . . ."

Sprinting towards the pitch, he tripped and fell, sliding across the slick grass. Harry looked behind him and saw that he had tripped over the body of a Death Eater. He looked again at the lawn and saw bodies lying between the pitch and the Forbidden Forest in two haphazard lines. A battle had taken place here. Witches and wizards had come out of the stands to form a human wall, facing the approaching Death Eaters.

Harry walked towards the heaviest concentration of the dead, steeling himself as he came upon the smaller bodies of students. In the middle of those bodies, history had repeated itself. Voldemort had killed his family again, or at least, had his family killed.

Six heads of red hair stood out as beacons amongst the fallen, their bodies spread across thirty yards of lawn and Death Eaters piled before them, a testimony to the determination and stubbornness of the Weasley family. Bill and Percy were barely recognizable. A few yards away and closer to the forest, Mr. Weasley lay on the ground, the lower half of his body missing.

Krum and Fleur approached silently as Harry moved down the line. Fleur could see each new recognition taking its toll as she watched him move from body to body, until he stood over the twin redheads still holding scorched wands. They had died as they lived, side by side.

Beyond the twins, lying on the ground were two other redheads and another witch. Fleur stepped towards them and recognized the three bodies. The first was the boy who had helped Harry get Gabrielle back to shore in the second task; the second was the brown, bushy-haired witch who was always with them, the friend whom Fleur had

seen comfort Harry on numerous occasions; the third was the little sister, the witch she'd caught Harry stealing glances at during the Yule ball.

Harry fell to his knees, crying, screaming in rage and anger and pain. It made Fleur clutch a hand against her chest, fingers digging into her skin as if she was trying to reach in and hold her heart together.

She didn't even realize that she had begun walking towards Harry when Krum stopped her. "Nein, ve need to check the grounds for anyone ve can help. Leafe him to mourn, he nicht needs see anything else."

She wanted to argue, but knew Krum was right. Regardless of how much Harry was hurting, the redheaded family couldn't be helped now.

Krum moved off to the left, checking the shadows and kicking bodies of Death Eaters out of his way. She finally moved to the right, seeing faces she remembered from the Great Hall: a Fourth Year from Harry's House with an Irish accent, next to him his best friend, a young black wizard that was always kind to her.

And I never cared to speak to 'im, to any of zhem. Mon Dieu.

Twins of Indian descent lay next to them. Fleur remembered how pretty she thought they were, walking next to Harry and the redheaded boy at the Yule ball. Laying next to them was a blond witch, but she lacked a face, or upper chest.

Fleur stopped and closed her eyes after the last image, not sure she wanted to continue on, knowing the horrors she was seeing would haunt her, but a grunting sound made her spin around and look.

It was Harry, dragging his best-friends' body across the grass. He gently laid him next to his father and kneeled down.

Though faint, Fleur heard him whisper, "Goodbye, Ron. You were the first real friend I ever had, the best mate I could ever hope for."

He stood and walked back to the bushy-haired girl – Hermione, Fleur remembered. Carefully, as if she was made of the most brittle china, he picked her up and carried her body to lay next to Ron.

Fleur couldn't hear what he said now, but she could see him fighting to hold back the tears, his love for the witch evident in his grief; then she watched as he lost the fight while carrying the youngest of the redheads back to her family.

'E's not much bigger zhen 'er. No boy should 'ave to do zhat, especially alone.

Decided, she hurried to Harry as he reached down and hooked one of the red-headed twins under the arms. Fleur kneeled down to pick up the legs.

"No! Go away! Don't touch him!" Harry yelled, tears flowing freely now as he struggled with the twin, slipping and falling in the slick grass.

"Please 'Arry, let me 'elp."

"No! This is all because of me. I failed them."

"Non 'Arry, you—"

"JUST—" he stopped, then started again, "just go help Krum, please?"

There was so much desperation in his voice that she found herself walking away, hoping that following his wishes would help, but knowing that hope was futile.

Fleur surveyed the human Maginot line, noticing more bodies thirty yards or so towards the pitch. All but one wore black robes and masks. She concentrated on the one body that lay in the middle of the others. . . and saw it move.

IT MOVED. Fleur ran, her heart hammering in her chest at the thought of finding at least one person alive.

She knew who it was, too. "Professor Dumbledore!" she whispered fervently as she knelt down.

He looked up at her. "Ms. Delacour, tell of the other Champions. Are they safe?"

"You need 'elp. Let me get—"

"I'm afraid," –he struggled to take a breath– "it's too late for that. I have but a few breaths left. Please, tell me, are the Champions safe?"

"Non, Professor. Cedric didn't make it."

Pain lined his face as he heard the news.

"And Harry and Victor?"

"Victor is 'ere. 'Arry's 'ere too, but not so good I think."

She saw worry flash across Dumbledore's face. "Non, 'e's safe. But what 'e went through, no boy should 'ave to endure."

"I should like to know," Dumbledore wheezed.

"Zhe cup was a Portkey. It took zhe four of us to a graveyard. A Death Eater used 'Arry's blood and. . ." –she choked back emotion– ". . . Voldemort is back."

Dumbledore closed his eyes.

When they opened again, he could only whisper. "Ms. Delacour, I need to know the details."

"Zhey bound 'Arry and cut 'is arm, zen collected 'is blood. After Voldemort was raised, 'e released 'Arry and used zhe Cruciatus on 'im. Zhe rest of us were below zhe 'ill. We rushed to zhe top to save 'Arry, but Cedric was 'it with zhe killing curse. Zhen Voldemort turned to cast it at me, but 'Arry saved my life."

Dumbledore's lips curled slightly in a wispy smile. "I believe that makes three." He laughed quietly, then coughed up blood.

Fleur conjured a cloth and wiped it from the corners of his mouth.

"'Arry cast zhe Cruciatus. Zhat's what saved me. It was powerful. Voldemort fell to 'is knees."



Dumbledore looked startled.

"But zhen, zhey cursed each other again and zhe curses met in zhe air. Zhe two of them were lifted up, and landed a ways away, and zhesse golden strands caged zhem in and I 'eard zhe most beautiful song. 'Arry won zhe duel and I grabbed 'im and apparated back before Voldemort could attack again."

As she finished her story, Dumbledore moved his hand, laying it on top of hers.

"Then I must lay on you a charge I have no right to lay, but every hope you will accept."

"Quoi?"

"Protect Harry. Only he can kill Voldemort."

She looked at him, dumbfounded.

"There is a prophecy—"

Fleur's heart sank.

"It was uttered soon before Harry was born. I am the only one who knows it. Now, you must too. If Harry has enough anger and hate to cast a Cruciatus curse powerful enough to injure the darkest of dark wizards, even newly risen, I fear what he will become to exact revenge, but revenge is his destiny, or his destruction. It was foretold before his birth.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches ... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies ... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not ... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives ... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies.' There were only two that were born as the seventh month died. Voldemort marked Harry."

"Non! C'est pas vrai!"\*

"What is so hard to believe?"

"But 'e's so young."

"I have not much time left. You must understand, the power the Dark Lord knows not is Harry's love. But what he has endured, that love can be turned to hate for his enemy. It would be powerful, but it would consume him, making him very dark, and when Voldemort was killed, Harry would have no reason left to live."

There were no words to express her shock.

"Please bring Harry to me. I have a wrong I need to right."

"Oui." Fleur found Harry a few minutes later, staring over the lawn, talking to himself.

"They all died, Hufflepuff was loyal to the end, standing side-by-side with Gryffindor. Some bodies of First Years are in the forest - can't find Professor McGonagall or Mrs. Weasley. I think they tried to save the younger children. . . but too many of them are dead. . . Ravenclaw was smart, always smart. . .a bunch of them are in the trees – able to see better higher up I suppose. . . providing protection for Firsties. . .but they're all dead. I can't get their bodies down. . ."

Harry fell silent.

Without saying a word, Fleur took him by the hand and led him back to Dumbledore, then backed away, sensing this conversation wasn't for her to overhear.

A few minutes later, she saw Harry reach into his robe and pull out a vial. Dumbledore was explaining something to him and Harry put his wand to Dumbledore's temple. Fleur read his lips as he instructed Harry on using the incantation, assuring Harry that his own magic would do most of the work.

When Harry pulled his wand back, a long, silvery smoke like substance followed the tip. He put it in the vial and sealed it, but seemed unable or unwilling to put it in his pocket.

Fleur stepped closer to take the vial, and overheard Dumbledore.

"I'm sorry Harry. I know the abuse you suffered at the Dursleys. I know of the beatings and how they refused to care for you. I was afraid to remove you, trusting the blood wards. But is living mere breath? Or is it allowing the soul to breathe? I have not allowed you to live. Sad that on one's deathbed, sight finally becomes clear. Forgive an old man his foolish mistakes Harry, I beg of you."

"Of, of course, Professor," Harry stuttered.

"Thank you. Now I believe it is time I move on to my next great adventure."

"No! You can't die!"

"I can, and I must. Remember Harry, the greatest magic is love, and you always have a choice, even a choice to love and be loved." Dumbledore closed his eyes, exhaled, and was gone forever.

Fleur saw Harry slowly look up. A moment later, his spirit broke. She saw it in his eyes. The way they danced, the way they seemed to smile even when he didn't, it was all gone. Emotion drained from his face, his body, leaving him an empty shell.

"I have to go to his office," he informed her in a monotone.

Krum came up behind Fleur as Harry walked away.

"How ist he doing?"

"I zhink, I zhink 'Arry's 'eart just died."

X O X O X O X

Harry walked down the corridor, whispered a password, then up the spiral stairs and into Dumbledore's office. He pulled the same pensieve he'd seen earlier in the year out of the cabinet and poured the memories into it, then leaned in. At first he thought he'd done it wrong since he found himself once again standing in the office. Then, looking around, he noticed Dumbledore sitting at his desk, reading. The book contained some of the darkest magic Harry had ever heard of. He watched as Dumbledore took notes, then leaned and read the word, "Horcruxes."

Harry looked back at the book and found the definition. He was mortified.

The memory dissipated and another came into view. This time, Harry was standing in Dumbledore's office, explaining what had happened in the Chamber of Secrets. The memory was too painful to watch as Ron, Ginny, and Mr. and Mrs. Weasley all stood before him.

Mercifully, the memory faded and another bled in. Dumbledore was examining the diary, staring at it and reading the same book on the Dark Arts. Then the scene changed again.

Harry was again in Dumbledore's office. It was the scene from just a few weeks ago. He was telling Dumbledore about his scar. Harry watched as the memory of himself left. Dumbledore leaned back in his seat, removed his glasses, and pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes. Harry continued to watch as Dumbledore mumbled a password, then opened a drawer and pulled out the book again. He thumbed through it to the now worn pages on Horcruxes, then stopped and sighed.

Harry leaned in to read.

Accidental Horcruxes: An accidental Horcrux can be created when, just after a Horcrux has been completed and the remaining soul is still unstable, the wizard murders again. If another powerful element of magic becomes entangled in the killing act (for instance, certain Druid or Gaelic rituals, blood wards, or mimetic magic) a Horcrux may be formed. However, the one who accidentally created the Horcrux most likely will not know of its creation or location, as the soul is already split by the first murder.

He looked up to see Dumbledore staring at the book, shaking his head.

The memory faded out and another began. Now he was in a run-down, dusty room on top of a bar and Dumbledore sat across the table from a young Sybil Trelawney.

As Harry listened to the prophecy. Two basic facts stood out. The first, was that he had to kill Voldemort. The second, was that in order for Voldemort to die, the part of Voldemort's soul in Harry had to die.

Harry remembered how the last Horcrux was destroyed and winced. Would this be his death too?

As he thought about it, the scene flashed again. This memory was hazy, as if it wasn't intended to be passed on. Harry recognized Dumbledore, rushing out of the stadium, but standing behind a line of wizards and witches as they began fighting with other, black robed entities. At first, Harry couldn't understand why Dumbledore wasn't fighting. But as he looked toward the forest, he noticed First and Second Years running that way and Dumbledore straining to cast invisibility charms, protective charms, and just about every other charm necessary to get them into the forest, all the while trying to conduct a search for the Champions and also instructing those up front fighting.

But even Field Marshals die in war. Dementors descended out of the skies, most of them focusing on Dumbledore. Death Eaters had looped around the end of the line of students and parents, coming at him from one side while others had broken through the wall, coming at him from another.

He had a choice to save himself, or save more young students. He took the latter, and was hit with numerous curses.

The memory dissipated and Harry found himself clutching Dumbledore's desk for support, the pensieve before him.

He quickly searched the desk and found Dumbledore's notes and the book in the bottom drawer, guarded by the same password he heard the Headmaster speak in the memory. He put both in his pocket and also retrieved the memory. Then went to the library.

He broke through the doors with a single spell and went straight to the restricted section, where he pulled out every book he could find on Dark Magic. He looked through them for Horcruxes, but also read other spells and articles that concerned revenge, visiting death on the enemy, and empowering magic through anger and hate.

They made him think about what happened in the graveyard, how his magic increased when he wanted revenge against Voldemort and Wormtail. With an arm full of the darkest books he could find to

research both Horcruxes and the affects of his anger on his magic, Harry left the library.

He wandered in the corridor, not knowing what to do. Flashes of light on the lawns caught his eye. He looked out the window and saw Fleur and Krum, dueling more Death Eaters.

Harry pulled out his wand. "Accio Firebolt!"

He sent a blasting curse through the window. As soon as his broom arrived, he mounted it, but as he went to kick off, most of the books fell out of his hand. There was no time to pick them up, but the two he still held, were the most promising.

A Dark Journey to Power was the first one, a biography of the darkest wizards through the ages. The author had been a little (well, actually far more than a little) too descriptive in explaining their methods.

The second book was Gebringang-pínere, "Birther of torment." An Old English book that had sat on the shelves of the Hogwarts library since Salazar Slytherin himself put it there out of his own personal library.

Harry left the rest of the books behind, shrunk these two, and slid them into his robes with the other book, then kicked off and flew through the broken window and straight at the Death Eaters who had their backs turned to him.

"Stupefy!"

He cast the spell three times, stunning three of the seven Death Eaters before two others turned on him, the last two still engaging the other Champions. Harry pushed down on the broom, diving to the ground at a tremendous speed, then pulled to the right. Finally, he pulled back on the broom and went ballistic, straight up into the night. Multiple colors of curses followed him, but the Death Eaters were too slow. Now hidden by the clouds, Harry flattened out, turned, shot back over a hundred yards, spun underneath the broom and then pulled, dropping the nose of the broom and diving back to the ground behind the Death Eaters again in a not so wide arc.

But as he came level and raised his wand, Krum took a green curse in the face. He fell backwards, joining the others in death.

Before, Harry's spirit broke.

Now, the dam holding his anger snapped in half.

"Incendio!" screamed Harry. The curse erupted out of his wand and the first Death Eater lit up the night, his robes burning like a torch, The screams were short lived and he too fell over dead.

The compunction to exact revenge surged through Harry as he prepared to cast the next curse. He'd never cast it before. Mad-eye had only taught them about it a few months earlier. But somehow, as if an intimate knowledge awoke, Harry understood the killing curse completely.

What he didn't know, what he couldn't know, was that he did know the curse intimately. Since he was the only one who had ever survived it, no one else knew the consequences of surviving the curse, knew that if a person did survive, the protection mechanism in the deepest part of a human's soul would remember the curse, in case he or she was ever faced with the need to use it or be killed by it again, like tonight. That knowledge also awoke another part, the Horcrux. It too fed Harry's rage and hate.

He screamed the words.

"Avada Kedavra,"

Another Death Eater would fight no more.

Clearing the rest of them by a few feet, Harry raced to Fleur, turned, and landed, wand in the air. He threw his broom to Fleur.

"Go, take my broom and leave."

He was met with a trilling, half spoken, half whistled response punctuated with sharp clicks. Harry risked a glance to his left and saw Fleur, no longer beautiful, and no longer truly able to be called human. She had transformed nearly as much as the full-blooded Veela, though she sadly lack the ability to cast fire.

Fleur saw him glance over and responded, in English this time. "One bee makes no swarm. I am not leaving."

The last two remaining Death Eaters, caught off guard by Fleur's transformation and Harry's appearance, went back on the attack. But Harry had already acted.

"Serpensortia," he yelled.

The largest snake he had ever seen shot out of his wand. He gave it a command in Parseltongue and the snake coiled, then launched at the nearest Death Eater, biting him in the arm.

Fleur's trilling and whistling increased dramatically.

The Death Eater cast two more curses, then began seizing. He fell to the ground.

Fleur blocked a curse headed for Harry, then sidestepped another.

"No. Go. Leave me to this, it's not your battle," Harry yelled again.

Without knowing how he did it, Harry gathered the magic within him and held it back, damming it up, and then released it in a curse that knocked the last Death Eater out cold.

Fleur grabbed Harry by the arm and shoved his broom back in his hand. "You are coming with me. We leave now, before more come."

Harry didn't argue. He mounted the broom again, Fleur sitting right behind him, and the two of them kicked off, flying toward the lake. He skimmed over it, then turned to the right and gained altitude, flying over Hogsmeade and into the mountains, guiding them to a small opening in the rocks. He landed, slipped off the broom, and disappeared into the shadows.

Fleur followed, hearing him quietly calling out, "Sirius? Are you here?"

Harry knelt down at the back of the cave, He picked up a newspaper that had a full story about the last task, including the date. Sirius would have been there to watch his godson.



"Oh god, not you too!"

"Arry, what is zhis place, and who is Sirius ?"

It took Harry a few moments before he found his voice.

"Black. Sirius Black."

"E's zhe Muggle murderer, no?"

Harry threw the newspaper down. "NO! He was not a murderer! Sirius Black was my Godfather."

Fleur looked at him like he was a five year old spinning a fanciful tale.

"I don't care if you believe me or not!" Harry barked.

He couldn't say anything else. Everyone he loved was dead and the one who killed them was once again alive. There was much vengeance to be had, even if Harry had to die getting it. But how could he do it? He was just one person, one fourteen year old wizard.

But what had just happened? Something had almost taken over inside of him when he cast—

Harry's eyes went wide at the realization of what he had done. He had killed someone. More than one, and used the killing curse to do it. Did his soul split? What was happening to him?

Harry thought about it more, then realized the key word he had read in the book earlier. It had come up in other articles as well. Murder. Not self-defense, but Murder split the soul. Tonight, he was fighting in defense of himself and two others.

But what did happen? Where did the infusion of power come from? The Horcrux? Was that it? he wondered.

"Harry."

Harry felt himself shaking, then realized that Fleur was standing in front of him, her hands on his shoulders. But Harry didn't answer. He

was too overwhelmed and had no one to go to now; not Dumbledore, nor Ron, nor Hermione, nor even Sirius. Harry slid down the wall to the floor and didn't move.

X O X O X O X

An hour later, Fleur was sitting close to a small fire she had conjured to keep warm. Basic wards were set at the entrance, enough to stop the light of the fire and sound from giving them away. Harry never moved nor said a word.

"I zhink we should apparate out of England, no?" Fleur ask, more out of habit than anything else. She wasn't expecting Harry to answer as she gazed into the fire, thinking about her new responsibility. How will I protect a leetle. . . non, not leetle. Everything she saw and learned about Harry over the last three hours swam before her eyes. Harry'd faced some very dark magic twice before this year. Then, he'd been forced to compete in a tournament that should have been way above his skill level. He had just faced down Voldemort and won in a duel of wills, if not wands. He was a Parsel-tongue who could cast and control monstrous snakes at will in battle. He had just killed two Death Eaters, and most of that after being Cruciatered over and over.

Fleur shivered at the thought of what Harry had endured during his life, let alone over the last few hours. 'E's so young, but seen so much. I can't let 'im suffer through it 'imself, but what can I do?

After another half an hour of arguing with herself, Fleur gave up, exhausted. She stood up and shook the dust from her cloak. "I zhink for now, we should get some sleep."

Harry didn't respond, though he began to shiver. Fleur quickly decided on heat over modesty. She transfigured two rocks into pillows and a few others into blankets, placing one on the floor of the cave and three others on top of it. Then she took her robe and laid it on the very top.

She crawled in between the sheets and laid down, looking at Harry.

"Zhis is for you too, 'Arry. Come, you are freezing."

But Harry stayed where he had slid down the wall to sit earlier. "No. I'll sleep here," he mumbled, shivering again.

"Zhat's foolish, 'Arry. You'll get sick."

Harry snorted.

Then Fleur cheated.

"Please 'Arry, come lay down," she said again, but her voice had a slight echo to it. She looked more beautiful than Harry had ever seen.

It wasn't as strong as last summer, when Harry almost threw himself from the box he was sitting in at the World Cup thanks to the dancing Veela, but the Veela magic entranced Harry again, drawing him to her.

He hesitated, fighting the magic. Fleur raised an eyebrow. The part of Harry's mind that was cataloging the scene, registered her surprise at his ability to resist.

Then Fleur cheated again, letting out more of her Veela magic. "Come 'Arry, it will be okay."

Harry stood and took two steps, then stopped again, fixing her with a glare. "Do you always lure leetle boys with your Veela magic?"

The Veela attraction ceased immediately. Fleur's look hardened and she turned over to face the wall. "Zhen go ahead an' get sick and die if you don't know the difference between zhose who care and zhose who would 'arm you."

Harry snorted again, but this time Fleur heard so much more in it. It was a snort of disgust, one that told her she didn't know at all what she was talking about.

But she did. She had overheard Dumbledore asking his forgiveness for putting him with that family. They must have been relations if there were blood wards involved, but why would they abuse him? Didn't they know what happened? Didn't they care?

She finally decided that 'Arry's life was beyond her. It was something that she simply would not be able to understand; not her. Fleur had to deal with. . . what? People thinking she was beautiful? Wizards asking her to dances? How dare she feel so put upon when 'Arry suffered so much, and still had cared so much for others.

She pushed the blankets back and stood up, walking over to Harry.

"Zhat was a foolish zhing for me to say. I just. . ." but she ran out of words and for the first time in her life, realized how much it hurt to be rejected.

But what Fleur's Veela magic couldn't do, the raw pain accomplished.

Harry stood up and walked over to the makeshift bed and laid down, though still not saying a word.

Fleur lay next to him, then leaned into him and put her arm over him and pulled him into her to stop his shivering.

"I zhink Gabrielle would be jealous, no? Don't worry 'Arry, I won't tell her if you don't. Anyway, it's for your body 'eat, not your body."

Harry blushed, despite his anger. Then he realized that no matter how dreadful the day was, no matter the amount of loss he had experienced, underneath it all, he was a fourteen year old wizard being spooned by a seventeen year old beautiful Veela in a cave, alone, in a makeshift bed. Harry's body started reacting in ways that took him by surprise, physical longings made themselves known throughout his body for the first time.

"Comfortable, 'Arry?" asked Fleur, with a hint of humor. Her Veela heritage gave her the ability to smell the hormones that she was setting off in him.

Harry grunted in response. But a few minutes later, he surprised her by talking.

"Tomorrow, I want you to take my broom and go back to France."

"What about you, 'Arry?" she asked.

"I've been on my own since I was small and I'm not dead yet, I can take care of myself."

"Zhat is not an option. You saved my life today, no? I'm not going to leave you."

"I saved your life?" Fleur was surprised at the hostility in his voice as he continued. "I saved no one's life. I got Cedric and Krum murdered. The whole of Hogwarts is dead because of me."

"Non, 'Arry, you can't blame yourself for thees."

"I can't? My mum died because of me, my best friend almost died in a real life game of chess to help me stop Voldemort, his little sister was almost killed by Voldemort so I could be blamed for being a part of Dark Magic. Now, they're all dead. What do you mean it's not my fault?"

"'Arry. . . wait, zhis was zhe third time you faced 'im?" Her voice was thick with surprise. Even she could hear the questions in it, wondering how he could face the darkest wizard, three different times.

"You can't keep zhis up very long 'Arry."

"I don't need to," said Harry cryptically.

Fleur put her hand on Harry's arm. "What are you saying, 'Arry?"

"Nothing."

"Zhen why did. . . ow! what is zhat?" Fleur felt under her hip for what she thought was a rock. Instead, she put her hand on the pocket of Harry 's robe. Somehow, it had slipped under her.

"What is in the pocket of your robe, 'Arry?"

"Just some things. . . Fleur, don't!" Harry turned over and saw Fleur pulling out the books he had shrunk. She picked up her wand and inspected the, by the light. Quickly, she countered the shrinking charm to see them better, then shot a glare at Harry that came way too much out of the other side of her Veela heritage for his comfort.

Her French accent deepened at the shot of emotion that jolted through her. "Jhust what ees zees 'Arry? I 'ave zeen zhis book. Eet ees not for good wizards."

"Fleur, there are things happening that you have no idea about; blood wards and dreams, to begin with. I can't run from this. Voldemort and I are linked in more ways than you'll ever know and somehow, I know it must be me that kills him. Dumbledore knew it too."

Fleur was transfixed by his depth of commitment to what amounted to a path of suicide. All because of a stupid prophecy.

But she was also a quick learner. Continuing this discussion would only incite him more.

"Let's just go to sleep. Tomorrow, we'll figure out what we're doing, yes? But I will not leave you 'ere if I go back to France, whatever we decide."

Harry finally agreed to go to sleep and deal with it in the morning. He laid down again and she put her arm back over him, drawing him in to her to make sure he didn't leave in the middle of the night. To make doubly sure, she draped a leg over him too, aware of the reaction she was also drawing from his body.

But that was fine with her. After what he'd seen today, she knew she had to chase away the memories from his dreams so he could rest. At least for tonight.

Dream, Harry did, but none of them included Voldemort, or what happened. Fleur made sure of it. She had let her Veela magic out just a little, to keep his mind on her instead of the hell that was his life right now.

X O X O X O X

"Come on 'Arry, it's time to wake up," said Fleur softly the next morning.

"Hmfffted. Leave me alone Ron," Harry responded, and buried his head in his pillow.

Only, it didn't feel like a pillow. Come to think of it, whatever he was currently nuzzling into didn't smell like a pillow either. It smelled wonderful, and felt wonder—oh dear god no.

Harry opened an eye to find himself using Fleur as his pillow.

She found it almost comical how Harry turned white, then looked up at her with fear in his eyes.

"Did you get a good sleep? "

"I, uh, I think," he stammered, then quickly pulled away and stood up.

She laughed and got up as well. They put their robes back on and sat down to decide what to do next.

Harry squeezed his eyes shut, knowing how much pain his next sentence was about to bring him. "We should go to the Burrow."

"What is zhat, 'Arry?"

"Remember the family of redheads that looked like they had taken on half the Death Eaters last night?"

"Yes. He was zhe young man who helped you save my sister."

"Yeah." Harry fought back the emotions. "The Burrow is where they lived. It might still be warded. If it is, I can get through them and we can spend at least a couple hours there and eat before we decided what to do."

"Zhen let's go. 'Ow are we going to get there?"

"It's in the South, in England. It's too far to fly by broom, especially in daylight. If you trust your Apparition enough, then we should Apparate to the field behind the Burrow.

The two of them went about trying to erase any sign they had been there, putting the fire out and removing all the wards.

Finally, After Harry had described the field in detail, he took a hold of the broom. Fleur put his arm under hers and concentrated on the

field behind the Burrow, a place she had never seen before. With a crack, the two of them disappeared from the cave. . . .

. . . And was now standing in a field. Harry turned around, and was hit square in the chest with grief. He struggled to gain his breath as tears threatened to break through. In front of him stood the Burrow. He could still see the makeshift Quidditch goals that Ron, the twins, and he had used the previous summer. The back fence that they had sent many a gnome flying over stood as a testimony to how life should have been, secure and in place. Harry forced himself to swallow the pain, to store it in order to feed off it later.

He led off with wand in hand, walking through the back gate and crossing the backyard, then slowly, carefully, he opened the backdoor.

He walked quietly into the kitchen, then turned back to look at Fleur. But a quick flurry of movement brought his attention forward. Suddenly, he found himself staring down the business end of two wands leveled at his face.

Neither owner had red hair.

\*For you French grammarians out there, yes, the proper phrase is "Ce n'est pas vrai!" But since I wrote as an informal gasp of disbelief, I decided to follow the common phrasing, "C'est pas vrai." If however, you noticed this and knew what I was doing, please get in touch with me, because obviously there is going to be quite a bit of French stuff in this writing, and I need a bit of help with phrases.

A/N Thank you everyone for leaving all the reviews, favoriting the story, and alerts. It was a wonderful surprise. Please continue to review, I greatly appreciate it.

I had to chuckle at poor Cedric. I felt bad killing him off as well. At some point in the development of the first chapter, he actually lived. But it just didn't seem right for all four of them to live in that battle, and since canon had him dying. . . !

As for casting the killing curse. I went back and checked canon, and the only issue with casting it is strength of magic and intent (The fake Moody's speech in GoF). The discussion about damaging the soul concerned murder, with Snape was talking with Dumbledore



about Draco. I tried to incorporate that point in this story. I hoped it worked.

Thanks again for your reads, reviews, and the like. I hope you're enjoying it.

## CHAPTER 3

### TO PUT AWAY CHILDISH THINGS

Reflexes honed by sport and heightened by peril compelled Harry to dive. Spinning and drawing his wand, he let one, then two spells loose before hitting the floor. Two Protego charms appeared just in time to deflect the curses.

The shields disappeared immediately and wands were twisted in the air, preparing to rain down hexes on Harry. He brought his wand back up swiftly, casting his own Protego shield as he pushed himself off the ground and further to the left.

But no spell was cast, they had anticipated the move; Harry was out of options—

—and Fleur knew it as she cleared the entryway. There wasn't a moment's hesitation before all three wizards in the room were dumbstruck by the goddess standing before them, but only for a moment. Anger and fear surged through her and the draw of the Veela ceased. It was long enough however, to gain the advantage. Fleur disarmed the two wizards - or one of them, at least - snatching the wand out of the air. Then she noticed the other wizard had already gained control over himself.

She turned her attention and her wand toward him. "Curse 'im and die you filthy pig," she threatened.

Both assailants were motionless and slack-jawed, but they weren't looking at Fleur.

"Harry?" one of them asked.

"SIRIUS!"

Fleur gasped as Harry scrambled off the floor and launched into the air. Sirius caught and held him tightly, crying at the sight of his godson.

"Oh, Merlin's arse, Harry, I thought we lost you forever."

"Harry," the other man sighed his name in relief.

"Professor Lupin!" he shouted. A moment later, Harry was engulfed in the arms of two wizards who were crying openly and without shame.

Fleur lowered her wand and blinked to clear the moisture in her own eyes, then noticed Harry. It was only the second time she'd seen him smile like he was now; a real and unadulterated smile. The last time was in the first task. Fleur had made her way back to the stands to watch the others compete. She watched as Harry faced off with his dragon, fascinated as the look on his face transformed when he mounted his broom. His smile was infectious and Fleur couldn't help but smile with him. The same was true today, and more. Not only did the corners of her lips pulled back, but a warmth spread through her, as if Harry's smile was the most important thing in her world. It's only natural that it should be - she convinced herself - at least 'e is with someone who loves 'im now. . . .

Or is he? Why does zhat not feel true?

Always one to trust her instincts, Fleur watched closely, preparing herself against any unseen danger. But after observing them some more, she could plainly see how much these two grown wizards loved Harry. Whatever the problem was, it wasn't with them.

Maybe I'm just a leetle overprotective right now, she rationalized.

Harry let go of the wizards and stepped back, still smiling and wiping his tears away. "I thought you were dead!" he said to Sirius. "How did you know to come here?"

But before Sirius could answer, a shrill and brittle voice came from the back of the house. "Harry! Harry, you're alive!"

All Fleur saw was a blur of robes and hair, then a witch threw her arms around Harry and held him so tightly he could barely breath. He returned the hug, crying again.

"Mrs. Weasley. . . " Harry managed between sobs.

The dumpy, middle-aged witch pushed him back to arms length, looking him up and down two or three times. "I can't believe it, it's you. It's really you." She pulled him into an even tighter hug.

Fleur tried to restrain the haughty look she'd perfected over the years, but it was difficult. The other witch was disheveled, her eyes red and puffy and definitely undignified.

After a minute or so, Mrs. Weasley asked Harry, "When was the last time you ate?"

"Mast might, phephfore fe phmournement," he answered, his words muffled against her.

"Then come sit at the table, I was making breakfast when we heard you enter the wards."

Harry shot a questioning look at her.

"Remus added another layer. They alert us whenever someone comes near us now."

"Oh," was all Harry said, still held tightly Mrs. Weasley.

"Molly, you better let him go," Sirius said with a smirk, "or you're going to make Harry's um," –he raised an eyebrow– "'friend' jealous."

Harry blushed. Fleur opened her mouth to clear up any confusion, but was cut-off.

"Oh belt up, Sirius." She let go of Harry, then fixated on Fleur, her own smirk finally appearing as her eyes fell on Sirius's wand in Fleur's hand. She turned back to him. "At least Remus has more control over himself. I see you're still losing your wand to all the pretty little girls."

Remus erupted in laughter. Sirius rolled his eyes and shoved him out of the kitchen, then followed him out complaining. "How could you possibly know how or when I lose my wand?"

"How many times did I see you get disarmed by the next-door neighbor witch when you were younger?" she replied, now laughing with Remus.

Fleur, however, remained in the doorway, stung like she was slapped in the face. Leetle girl? 'Ow dare she call me a leetle girl. After facing dragons and dark creatures and Death Eaters and. . .

". . . Bon sang!" she whispered in surprise. Was zhat why 'Arry was so mad at me when I said 'e was just a leetle boy?

Fleur shut her eyes and shook her head, again thinking about how much she had misjudged him the night their names were chosen by the Goblet.

"Fleur, dear, I meant for you to come in too, you must be hungry," Mrs. Weasley called back to her.

"Merci," Fleur stepped further into the Burrow and noticed the worn carpets; the table, propped up with magic; the stained but clean tea towels, hanging from a drying rack. It was all so. . . pedestrian.

She shook the thought and sat at the table next to Harry as Remus and Sirius repaired the damage from the curses.

"Harry, as your former DADA teacher, I'm impressed. That was some fast thinking and faster dueling."

"Thanks," mumbled Harry. "It wasn't that much though, you should have seen Krum duel."

"Krum?" Sirius echoed, his eyes growing narrow and dark as he leaned against a wall. "Tell me why you had an opportunity to experience a duel with Krum."

"No, not like that," Harry protested. "He saved my life last night." He gestured towards Fleur. "All three of them did, then Fleur almost splinched herself Apparating me back to Hogwarts."

Sirius stared at Fleur, but she could tell he wasn't looking at her like most other wizards. It was almost as if he thought that he owed—"

". . .You a great debt of gratitude," Sirius finished saying, shaking his head and unknowingly completing her thought.

He turned back to Harry. "So, Victor Krum, the world-famous seeker, and Fleur, the beautiful Veela Tri-wizard champion." He pushed himself off the wall, grabbed a pitcher of pumpkin juice from the kitchen and walked to the table. "At least you've improved the company you keep, it's a step-up from a mass-murderer and a lowly half-breed, I think."

"Pardon moi?" Fleur interjected, gaping at Sirius as he pulled a chair out from the table.

"Never mind him," Remus said, chuckling. "Though I do apologize in advance for anything he says or does, or even thinks for that matter." He pushed Sirius away as he spoke, taking the seat for himself and sitting down.

Fleur's attention flicked to Remus, but she didn't take his advice. "What do you mean, 'alf breed?" she asked Sirius, anger and offense clearly evident in her voice.

Remus leaned back in his chair, locked his fingers behind his head, and grinned. "Yes, Padfoot, please explain to the beautiful, young, part Veela what you mean by 'half-breed'."

Fleur huffed and turned to Harry. "'Ow can you let zhem speak of 'alf-breeds like zhis!"

"Let Sirius explain," Harry answered, torn between laughing at his godfather's predicament and allaying Fleur's anger.

"That's probably not a good idea," said Mrs. Weasley, carrying a plate piled with food. She set it on the table. "That's for starters, I'll make more."

Sirius reached for a breakfast roll and a slap echoed across the room.

"Get your hands off the food!" Mrs. Weasley gestured towards Harry and Fleur. "Let those two eat first."

Sirius rubbed the back of his hand, then quickly stole a breakfast roll before she could stop him and flashed her a mischievous smirk.

Mrs. Weasley shook her head and grinned at his antics before turning to Remus. "I suggest you explain Sirius's comment before Ms. Delacour decides to hex him into next week."

"I don't know Molly, it might be fun to watch," he replied.

She snorted and walked back into the kitchen as Remus thought better of her advice. For the next quarter-hour, Fleur listened intently as he explained his relationship to Sirius and Harry's father, and what they did for him once they found out about his condition.

"You 'ave been a werewolf all zhat time?" she finally asked.

"I have," confirmed Remus.

She glanced at Sirius. "And 'e's been your friend through it all?"

"No," Remus said. "But that's my fault. I thought Sirius betrayed Harry's father and killed Peter, the fourth part of our little group. I believed he was the murderer everyone said he was. Ironical, isn't it?"

"Why is zhat ironical, Mr. Lupin?"

Sirius kicked Remus's chair. "Makes you feel old when she calls you that, doesn't it?"

"I am old," he replied, "and at least I act my age. . . most of the time."

They chuckled at a private joke, then Remus continued explaining. "The Black family is one of the oldest, darkest, and at one time, was one of the most powerful families in all of wizarding England. With that history, I assumed he had turned to the Dark Arts and Voldemort, even after he ignored the fact I was a werewolf for years."

"Ignored?" Sirius sounded highly offended, but humor crept back into his voice. "I was scared to death. The only reason I did it was because I thought being 'caring' and 'brave' would land me more witches."

"Didn't work, did it?" Remus asked. "Shame too. Merlin knows your looks weren't going to help any."

Sirius picked up another breakfast roll and threw it at Remus, and was smacked on the arm by Mrs. Weasley as she walked by.

"Don't waste my food," she reprimanded him.

"What?" he protested, then winked at his godson. "Harry threw it, not me."

"In that case," -she reached over and smacked him again- "that's for not keeping your godson under control."

Laughter rose from the table and to Fleur surprise, she found herself laughing right along with them.

Mrs. Weasley took the opportunity to shovel another helping (or two) of eggs and bangers onto Harry's plate. Then she caught Fleur's eye and smiled at her, leaned over, and did the same before Fleur could say anything. "I imagine you've been through a lot, you need to eat, and I want no protests."

Fleur nodded, noticing the inner-strength the Weasley matriarch exuded, even in her loss.

Harry's voice drew her from her thoughts. "But how do you know each other?" he asked one of the two men.

"The Blacks and Weasleys are both pure-blood families," Sirius answered. "In this world that means we're related. Her uncle Ignatius was my uncle by marriage. I spent most of my summers at his and Lucretia's house before I left home. Molly was there often. She was a few years older than me so naturally—"

"He spent the time terrorizing me," Mrs. Weasley said with a wistful voice, "that is, when he wasn't dueling the neighbor witch, or trying to seduce her."

At this comment, Sirius spread out his arms and tried for a look of innocence.



It just made him look all the more guilty, Fleur thought, laughing within herself.

"But how did you know he wasn't. . ." Harry stopped – not able to form the word for some reason.

"Dumbledore informed us when we came to see you earlier this year. We offered the Burrow as a safe-haven and Dumbledore said he would pass it on, but the mutt turned us down. Then, once we helped Minerva get some of the younger children to safety, I practically kidnapped him for his own sake, again.

"Again?" Harry repeated.

Sirius glanced at Mrs. Weasley, then took a deep breath. "Harry, the Burrow was a safe-house in the war against Voldemort. After. . . after your parents had the Fidelius charm put in place, we agreed that I shouldn't be seen much. Once Molly found out that I was supposedly the secret keeper, she cornered me in Longbottom's kitchen. After the first three or four hexes, I decided it'd be good for my health to stay at the Burrow like Arthur and Molly were offering."

"Then that means. . ." he turned to Mrs. Weasley, who was looking down at the table.

"Yes Harry," Sirius answered for her. "I was sitting where you're sitting now when Dumbledore's Patronus informed me that Voldemort had attacked."

Fleur saw Harry's emotional wounds that still bled pain from the loss of his parents and bit her bottom lip, again amazed at how much the young wizard carried on his shoulders on a daily basis.

Mrs. Weasley sniffed. "It was the darkest day in my life – 'till yesterday." She quickly picked up a couple empty dishes and hurried off into the kitchen, only to return with moist eyes and more food.

Remus took another roll and bit into it, studying it intently before continuing the story. "Molly and Arthur weren't involved in the war, supposedly. But do you really think a witch of Molly's. . . constitution," he said delicately, which earned him a watery smile,

"would let her two brothers be part of it without doing anything herself?"

"I was pregnant through most of it," she cut in, "All I could do was offer a safe house."

"Which was probably Arthur's plan," Sirius said half-jokingly. Then all humor escaped his voice. "And he was a good man for it. There was so much death, so much heartache. We were losing friends left and right and the Prewetts had lost too many in the damn war already."

His composure broke. He slammed his hand on the table and turned to Mrs. Weasley, his words coming out in a fury. "I saw them all last night, right in the middle of the battle. I did every bloody damn thing I could to save Arthur, but I was no use until I could find a wand and by then—"

Mrs. Weasley put her hand on Sirius's arm, crying once again. "I know you did, and you almost got yourself killed saving my life."

She explained it to Harry. "He took down a Death Eater, took the wand in his mouth, and chased after me. We ran into the Forbidden Forest and hid, protecting some of the wounded and younger students that were with us. That's when he transformed and just about killed me with fright—"

"What do you mean, 'transformed?' " asked Fleur.

"Did you ever wonder why a big, black, mangy dog was always walking around the students during Hogsmeade weekends?" Sirius asked her.

"I thought it was just looking for. . . Zhat was you?"

"It was him, and a fool of a chance he took too," Remus answered for him.

Molly continued. "Last night, after he transformed, he held off numerous Death Eaters as we moved the children deeper into the woods. He saved my life, the lives of twenty or thirty First and Second Years, and a few older ones that were helping us as well."

"Not enough," Sirius whispered, "how many of them are dead today?"

"I don't know, if this is a sign of things to come, then those who are alive today, may be dead tomorrow." Remus looked out the window with a thousand-yard stare. "We don't even know what today will look like now—"

"Dragon spit!" Mrs. Weasley swore. "How could I forget that!"

"What?" Remus asked, confused.

Her voice rose an octave, "How could I have forgotten the Longum-interimere spell.

Fleur looked back and forth between the three of them, wondering why each face had blanched.

Mrs. Weasley wasted no time however. "Harry, after you finish eating, you're going to go into the other room with Remus and Sirius and let them look you over; make sure you weren't hit with the spell. Fleur, you'll come upstairs with me for privacy. Then we'll get some clean clothes for both of you."

"Mrs. Weasley," Harry began.

Sirius cut him off. "Don't argue with her Harry. I'm a damn fool for forgetting about that. Molly's seen more of this kind of thing than you can ever imagine."

"Pardon moi for asking, but what is zhis spell?"

Mrs. Weasley turned to Fleur with a look of disgust. For a moment, Fleur thought it was directed at her. But then the older witch began speaking. "It is a spell to terrorize families. Loved ones are attacked, but live. They go home to their families and everyone is happy because mummy or daddy is still alive. Then, whatever spell was cast with it, begins to take root in the body and wreak havoc, slowly killing the person in front of their loved ones who are powerless to stop it. We only figured it out about three months before the war was over."

"Zhat is 'orrible; you think we were 'it with it?"

"Probably not," Molly said forcefully. "But I am also not going to be stupid enough to assume you weren't. We figured out how to counter it, but it has to be within the first twenty-four hours. We have more than enough time to finish our breakfast. After that, however, you both are going to be checked out thoroughly."

Harry and Fleur both nodded, but didn't say anything. A heaviness settled over the table as they ate their meals in silence.

As they were finishing, Sirius finally asked, "What happened last night? When they attacked, the professors immediately removed the maze, but all four of you were gone."

Harry set his fork down and leaned back, looking at Fleur. Her shoulders slumped and she returned his gaze.

Sirius's eyes narrowed considerably as he saw the change in the two teenagers.

"It was a Portkey," Harry finally answered. "Cedric and I figured out that something was wrong, so we stayed together in the maze. We found Fleur a little later and convinced her as well. When we came upon Krum, he almost cursed us, but was able to fight off an Imperius spell someone had cast on him."

"What?" Remus growled, sounding unquestionably more like a wolf than a human at the moment.

Fleur also noticed Sirius's hand twitching for his wand, which she had already given back to him.

"We decided there was no way we were going to separate after that and finished the maze together. But when we found the cup, no one wanted to claim the victory. Like an idiot, I suggested we split it between the four of us and we all reached for the cup at the same time. It turned out to be a Portkey, and took us to a cemetery."

Harry almost jumped at the touch of Fleur's hand on his own.

"Non, 'Arry, don't call yourself an idiot for suggesting what was most fair."

She took over explaining. "It was awful. Zhere were over a 'undred of zhem - Death Eaters I zhink you call zhem. All but ten Apparated to 'Ogwarts. Zhe ten, zhey bound 'im up. 'Arry told us to leave but instead, we 'id at zhe bottom of zhe leetle 'ill. We watched as zhey cut 'is arm, zhen collected 'is blood in a vial. Zhey poured it in a cauldron that Voldemort was in and he resurrected—"

"WHAT!" Sirius's chair flipped over. He was on his feet, his wand in his hand.

"Easy, Sirius. He's not here now, is he?" asked Remus.

Sirius righted the chair and sat down. "I'm sorry, Ms. Delacour. Please continue."

"After Voldemort returned, 'e 'it 'Arry with zhe Cruciatus curse many times."

Sirius and Remus both turned and stared at Harry. Mrs. Weasley let out a strangled cry and clamped her hand over her mouth.

"That was when," Harry broke in, "the three of them came back up the little hill and killed three of the Death Eaters. Cedric killed the one next to Voldemort, who in turn killed him."

Harry was silent for a few seconds, obviously reliving the scene.

"Then what happened?" Remus softly prodded.

Fleur noticed Harry was about to continue. She reached over and put her hand on his again, but left it there this time. The corner of Fleur's lip pulled up slightly, proud of what she was about to say. "Zhen, 'Arry zaved my life. I was about to be 'it with zhe killing curse when 'Arry got zhe bâtard with a Cruciatus."

"Harry!" Mrs. Weasley screeched. "That is a dark curse! And illegal!"

Sirius cut in, raising his voice slightly. "I don't think the legality of the curse is an issue Molly, especially since he was facing the darkest wizard in over a century and the murderer of his parents."

"Exactement!" exclaimed Fleur. "Zhen 'Arry cast another curse and 'e cast one too. Zhe curses met in zhe air and turned gold, lifting

zhem off zhe ground and setting zhem down in a clear spot, but zhey were caged in by light. 'Arry won zhe duel and zhe curse 'it Voldemort so 'ard 'e was thrown to zhe other side of the graveyard. Zhen I grabbed 'Arry, and we apparated to zhe road outside of 'Ogwarts.

"A leetle while later we were attacked. Viktor was killed, but 'Arry saved my life, again. Zhis time, 'e flew out of zhe castle on his broom, disarmed three Death Eaters and killed two others, zhen threw 'is broom at me and told me to leave. But zhere was no way I was leaving. 'E took out zhe last Death Eater, then we both mounted 'is broom and flew to your cave." She looked at Sirius as she finished and noticed pride surging through him, the same was true of Remus.

"There's so much of his father in him," Sirius mumbled.

"Maybe too much," Remus muttered into his cup as he took a drink.

Sirius looked at his long-time mate and smirked. "Don't worry, Moony, I doubt he's going in to town to pick up power-converters."

"Prat."

"Hey, it was your idea to see what Muggles did for fun and take us to a drive-inn on my bike all those year ago."

X O X O X O X

An hour later, Fleur was upstairs, now stripped to her bloomers. Mrs. Weasley was running her hand and wand over every inch of Fleur's exposed body. "I'm sorry. I know this must be embarrassing, but I lost too many friends in the war to the spell. Like Sirius said, we finally figured it our towards the end; but by then, I lost both brothers."

Fleur opened her mouth to speak, then closed it, conflicted. She didn't belong in a house like this; a house that spoke of little money and even less societal concern. Not even six months ago, she would have turned her nose up and Apparated straight back to France without a second thought.

But now? There was no way she'd leave Harry to deal with the consequences of last night. She couldn't walk away and ignore what had happened; nor, she realized, to her confusion, did she want to.

Then there was the witch caring for her now. She wouldn't have given Mrs. Weasley a second look had she passed her on the street. But watching her this morning as she wrestled with the death of her family and remembering the strength that emanated from her, Fleur pondered how she could have been so wrong with her first impression. Of course, she had to admit to herself that she'd been just as wrong about Harry, Sirius, and Remus.

How many others had she been wrong about?

The question was too uncomfortable. Instead, she looked around the room, hoping to find something to spark conversation. Fleur saw the hairbrushes, the bands and untouched ribbons to tie up hair, and pictures that spoke of a young witches' friends and hopes.

"Was zhis your daughter's room?" she asked innocently.

Mr. Weasley hesitated and Fleur saw her erect an emotional wall.

Fleur lowered her head. "Je suis désolé – I am sorry. I am beginning to see zhat I think and say things without regard of others."

"We all have our foibles," Mrs. Weasley assured her in a kind voice. "You'll never know the kindness you paid me by saving Harry. I think of him as one of my own."

Mrs. Weasley paused for a moment, then came to some kind of decision. "I know my house isn't the picture of grandeur you're probably used to, but you are welcomed to stay here whenever you have need." She moved to Fleur's back, still searching inch by inch.

Fleur turned her head slightly to look in Ginny's mirror, ashamed of the reflection for the first time in her life. Here was a witch who had lost her family in one night; yet she was opening her arms and home to Fleur, even though she obviously knew what Fleur thought of her home and by extension, her.

It is time to put away childish things.

Her first attempt to do so fell short. "I think your 'ouse is lovely."

Mrs. Weasley stopped and sat back on her heels. "No, you don't, I read it on your face all morning, but that's okay. You protected Harry last night. You also could have left him here this morning and Apparated away, maybe even back to France, depending on how good you are at it, but you didn't. Instead, you stayed in a place that you thought was below you in order to make sure Harry was okay. That means more to me than anything you could think concerning what my late husband could provide."

The rebuke coated in the compliment crushed Fleur. She spun around and faced the older witch in a rush of emotion. "Forgive me. I started zhis year 'aughty and arrogant. I don't wish to finish it zhat way, not with someone who loves 'Arry zo much."

Why did she say that?

Mrs. Weasley wondered the same thing. She moved to the bed and sat down. "I finished checking your back. You're safe."

"Thank you, Mrs. Weasley."

"I believe you're seventeen, is that correct, Fleur?"

"Oui."

"Then you're of age and my name is Molly, okay?"

Fleur smiled and put on the old shirt Molly had brought in while her clothes were being cleaned. She reached back and pulled her hair out from under the shirt, giving a furtive but longing glance to a hairbrush sitting on the desk.

Molly saw the glance. "It's okay. There are a lot of things I'm going to be sentimental about when it comes to my daughter, but her hairbrush is not going to be one of them, trust me. Matter of fact, why don't you bring it here."

Fleur did as Molly asked, handing her the hairbrush.

"Sit down and talk with me." Then Molly gestured with the hairbrush to Fleur's hair, "do you mind?"



"I zhink I would feel uncomfortable since you've done so much already and all I 'ave done is insult your 'ome and 'usband."

Molly gazed at her for a moment, then instructed her again to sit down and asked, "What happened to you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You are not the Fleur that I saw at Hogwarts."

Fleur, now sitting, shook her head slowly. "I don't know. Everything is so different in such a short period of time. I don't know where to start explaining."

"I understand." Molly empathized. "In that case, I'm going to be blunt. But first, turn around and let me brush your hair. As I've said, you brought Harry to us safely and we are in your debt for that – and I can tell it's pushing you 'round the twist not being able to brush it."

Fleur nodded, not able to deny the longing, though it seemed so incongruent with the discussion and the last few days.

Molly drew the brush through the long, platinum hair. "Sometimes, when so much changes so fast, it's the small pleasures like having your hair brushed that help reorient ourselves. Strange, I know, but it's true."

"But was does 'Arry 'ave to reorient 'imself?"

"Harry," Molly breathed his name. "Harry is more than 'The Boy Who Lived', He's a young man who has seen nothing but heartache, pain, and suffering in his life. Very few people ever care to get to know the real Harry. I don't know if he has anything to help him reorient himself."

"I can see zhat," Fleur said. "'E's been through so much. I overheard Dumbledore talking with 'im about zhose awful people 'e lives with."

"Awful is too kind of a word for them. At the end of every summer, Harry comes here looking like a wraith. He usually loses half a stone of weight during the summer months, but it's not just food. He's starved for love, affection, friendship, everything you and I take for

granted." She took a deep breath, then whispered. "I don't know how he's going to bear the weight of it all now."

"What do you mean?" Fleur turned back around to see Molly gauging her. It felt as if she was being weighed and measured, and maybe even had been found wanting. It both angered and humbled Fleur.

"How committed are you to seeing this through with Harry?" Molly asked, surprising her.

"I 'aven't thought about it beyond what to do next. But I am willing to bring 'im to France with me, so we may plan together. 'E would stay with me and my family to be safe."

Molly nodded. "You need to know, everyone he has loved and everyone who has loved him, except for those in this house, are dead."

The plain, ugly truth sucked the wind out of Fleur. "Everyone?"

"Everyone. Ron and Hermione, the twins, my daughter, my husband, Dumbledore; Sirius, Remus, and myself are probably all that's left of a world that he was introduced to four years ago. As far as I can tell, no one loved him before he came into this world either.

There are no words. . . . But she was caught short by Molly's next request.

"Whatever you do, don't hurt him."

"What does this mean, 'don't 'urt 'im'?"

"I just worry about him," Molly temporized, realizing she'd said too much.

"I don't want to 'urt 'im. 'E's 'ad too much 'urt already."

"Good." Molly paused. "Will you promise me something?"

"Quoi?" Fleur asked, remembering a conversation like this a little over twelve hours ago.

"Promise me that if you take him to France, you'll keep him there. Do everything in your power. Hex him, tie him up to the tree outside your house, even use your Veela charm if you have to, but don't let him come back here. I know Harry. If he comes back, he will seek out He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, and will kill him. Win or lose, Harry will lose himself in the hunt."

"I'm afraid 'E already 'as. I need to tell you something, but zhat man downstairs, Sirius, he loves 'Arry too?"

"Yes, very much."

"Will 'Arry listen to 'im?"

"Maybe. It depends." Molly gave Fleur a very stern look. "What are you saying? I want to know, now."

"I zhink we need Sirius here too."

X O X O X O X

While Mrs. Weasley and Fleur were upstairs, Sirius and Remus took Harry into the front room. Harry disrobed gingerly.

"Harry, you need to learn how to duck a few of them curses," Sirius joked, trying to cover the uneasiness he felt at the marks on Harry's body.

Across Harry's chest, shoulders, and upper arms; blue, purple, red, and green streaks highlighted every blood vessel in the skin. He looked like a living, breathing road map.

"Still feeling the effects of last night?" Remus asked.

"Speaking of last night," Sirius said, raising his eyebrow, "I noticed the story ended with Krum being killed, and the two of you flying to my cave. Then you two show up on the doorstep this morning. Did you stay in the cave all night?"

"Yeah, Fleur warded it so light and sound couldn't escape."

"Oh? Light and sound?"

"Sirius," Remus said under his breath, "leave it alone."

He turned to Remus, "No, it is my responsibility as his godfather to make sure that all things are handled. . . appropriately."

Harry finished disrobing, standing before them in a pair of boxers. They began checking him over for wounds too small for the eye to see at first, careful not to cause more pain as they ran their hands and wands over the skin.

Harry finally answered. "Yeah, light and sound, why?"

"Oh, no reason," Sirius chuckled. "Where did you sleep?" he asked.

"In the cave, I just said that."

"That's not what I'm asking, Harry."

Remus shot Sirius a warning glance.

"Then what are you asking?"

Sirius just grinned from ear to ear and continued to search along his chest.

"Sirius?" Harry asked again, a bit agitated.

"I was asking, where, in the cave did you sleep."

"I don't know, against one of the walls, why?"

"And where did Fleur sleep?" Sirius pushed.

Remus groaned and shook his head.

"In the cave as well."

Impossibly, Sirius's grin got even larger. "I was just wondering how you um – liked my cave?"

"Fine, I guess. . ."

"Just fine? You didn't find it extraordinary last night? Or even incredible?"

"It was dark and I barely even saw what I was doing, let alone checked things out, why?"

Sirius hooted in laughter.

Harry looked over at Remus. "What's he getting on about?"

"Oh, nothing. He's just wondering if you and Fleur mixed potions last night."

"Mixed. . . what?"

Sirius stopped and leaned back. "You know Harry, since I am your godfather, it's my place to tell you that if you are going to mix potions with a witch, make sure you are wearing the proper robes."

Lupin snorted and Harry rolled his eyes. "Are you really asking if I wore a glove while catching her snitch last night?"

Sirius rolled over onto his side in laughter. It wasn't that he hadn't heard that before, he just never expected it from Harry.

"Just to make myself clear, nothing like that happened." Harry said a little defensively.

Sirius resumed his search for the traces of the curse. "Alright, I just had to ask."

"Why?" Harry barked at him.

"Because the way she kept touching your arm and hand this morning, the way she got angry with you when she thought I was being a pure-blooded bigot, it means something Harry."

"What?"

"Nope, it's for you to figure out, though I will say this. From what little I heard and saw, that young lady upstairs, is one hell of a witch."

"Yeah," Harry mumbled, "try sleeping with her arm and leg draped over you half the night."

"What was that?" Remus asked with a huge smile. "You mumbled."

"Never mind."

Remus and Lupin grinned widely, feeling somewhat sorry for Harry. They remembered what Fleur's magic felt like.

The grins disappeared suddenly as the ward alarms alerted them that someone had Apparated to the Burrow. One, now two, now three people were quietly walking through the backyard. Harry barely had enough time to pull on his trousers and trainers before whoever it was reached the back door.

He stood on the balls of his feet, naked from the waist up, gripping his wand and preparing to fight. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Mrs. Weasley and Fleur at the top of the stairs. Fleur and Harry's eyes met and Fleur gawked at the marks on Harry's chest.

Then they heard Lupin swear in the kitchen.

"Bloody Hell!"

It wasn't like him to swear. Harry knew something was coming, and it probably wasn't good.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

I hope you're enjoying tale. Please leave a comment if you are, or even if you aren't.

If you've enjoyed this story, please take a look at my other story I am currently working on. It's not a Harry/Fleur fic, but a D.A. fic set in Deathly Hallows. It follows canon, but I'm trying to flesh a lot out. I have 19 chapters posted and would love more feedback. I'll be bouncing between these two stories until both of them are finished.

Now, for some shout-outs.

First, to my Beta, PhoenixFanatic999. Thanks for all your hard work, especially in canon/storytelling, and plot.

Reviewers:

Nicks244 – Nice guess!

twistyguru and ed-hunter616 – I hope you consider this chapter as good as the others... let me know if you don't!

Venpex – Your concern about Bella not having the strength is actually answered in the next chapter, so hold on tight! It seems Voldemort has done some scheming for a while now.

TNT220 – We're about two or three chapters away from seeing Gabrielle and oh, by the time this story is over, she's going cause a MAJOR scene that I think, is going to be hilarious (have to have some humor in a dark fic, or it's just too depressing). BTW, Fleur's reaction to this scene, IMO, is priceless. Then again, being the author, if I didn't think that I probably wouldn't write it. ;)

To all my other reviewers, thanks, and keep reading please!

## CHAPTER 4

### UNBIDDEN VISITORS AND UNBIDDEN REVELATIONS

Remus held his wand in one hand and reached for the door with the other. "How can I be of service to you, Madam Bones?"

In the sitting room, Harry could hear the uneasiness in Remus's voice. It wasn't a coincidence that the head of DMLE was at the back door after Sirius showed himself last night.

"First you can stop trying to kiss my arse," answered the witch in a brusque voice. "Second, you can allow us into the house."

Remus raised his wand. "Not before you tell me the first thing you said to me concerning me teaching at Hogwarts."

"As long you take that potion, I don't give a damn if you're a werewolf."

Remus kept his wand trained on her and addressed her niece. "What was your Boggart form in my class?"

"A Ministry worker dressed in black with his hat in his hand on my doorstep."

He nodded, and asked the third witch, "What did you do to earn your house twenty points from me?"

She grinned wickedly. "I hexed Malfoy – a few times."

Remus smirked.

"May we step in now?" Madame Bones asked. "I don't particularly enjoy standing in the open after what happened last night."

Remus stepped back. "Come in and close the door, but no further than the kitchen until I've asked a couple more questions."

As soon as the door was shut, he began. "What business have you here?"



"I need to talk to Sirius Black."

That was all Harry needed to hear. He stormed into the kitchen – still without a shirt – with his wand in hand. His voice was cold and lacked inflection. "My godfather is innocent. Accept it, leave, or there's going to be a bloody mess to clean up by the time we're through. It's your choice."

Susan risked a glance at her friend, then back at Harry. He almost smiled at the irony. In their second year, Ernie Macmillan, Hannah Abbot, and she gobbled on continuously about him being the Heir of Slytherin. Now, when he was dangerous, the little witch was just gobsmacked.

"Don't do anything rash, Potter. I think you'll like my news," Madam Bones answered. "There were reports of a powerful magic 'happening' in a Scotland graveyard last night. I had the Auror department investigate it early this morning. They found the bodies of Peter Pettigrew and five Death Eaters. A bit later, Minerva appeared at my door with my niece and I persuaded their memories."

"A Death Eater does not fight against his own, nor does he lack The Mark. It was noticeably absent in the memory when Sirius Black helped Susan; something a trial would have proven years ago."

"That, along with Minerva providing me a memory concerning a conversation she had with Dumbledore, convinced me Sirius Black is innocent."

She slowly reached into her robe and pulled out The Daily Prophet.

"I've spoken to some people on the Wizengamot. Have you seen a copy of today's paper?" She asked.

"No," Mrs. Weasley answered, walking into the kitchen. "I stopped my subscription after the lies that wretch Rita Skeeter was printing."

"In that case" – she handed the paper to Remus – "Maybe you should read the headline on the first page, below the fold."

Remus took the paper and read the two headlines out loud. SIRIUS BLACK IS INNOCENT!" the first one announced. On the other side

of the page, a second headline blazed, "PETER PETTIGREW: KILLED LAST NIGHT IN GRAVEYARD!"

"It's official," Madame Bones confirmed. She looked at the black dog standing at Harry's side. "A copy of the order dropping the charges and exonerating you is on the next page."

Sirius morphed into his human form, looking equal parts thankful and outraged. "Forgive me if I can't find it within myself to thank the Ministry for proclaiming my innocence after a decade at Azkaban."

"That is why I didn't ask," she responded. "I would be remiss, however, if I didn't remind you that you have a right to be heard in the Wizengamot concerning your wrongful imprisonment."

Sirius grinned for a moment, thinking about what was just offered to him, but the realpolitik of the day won. "As much as I would love to, it's not a good idea to undermine the Ministry with everything that happened last night."

"Oh?"

"It far outweighs what was done to me," he continued.

"Are you reading more into it than I am, Mr. Black?" she asked, her eyebrows arched high enough that Harry thought her monocle might fall out.

"I think you should let Harry explain," Sirius answered.

Madame Bones directed her focus at Harry. "Then explain."

Harry made snap decision to be just as direct as she was, partly due to her method of addressing him. "Voldemort incarnated last night. We are at war again."

The monocle fell out and dangled by the string. "This is not a time for jokes, boy!" she snapped at him.

"JOKES?" Harry fired back, then pointed to the multi-hued streaks spider-webbed across his chest and shoulders. "Do you think I did this to myself? LOOK AT ME! This is the result of being the hexing-toy of the newly enflashed Voldemort."

Harry continued to glared at her until a small, feminine hand lightly touched his chest, tracing the marks.

"Does it hurt?" Cho Chang asked.

He opened his mouth to answer, but nothing came out. A moment later, he turned red as Fleur walked into the kitchen, her eyes flaring at Cho caressing Harry's chest.

Harry decided to skip Cho's question and stepped back from her touch before explaining what happened.

"The other Champions and I fought a battle with Voldemort and some of his Death Eaters last night at that graveyard. That is where he was resurrected before he began cursing me. I only escaped when the other Champions came to my rescue."

"I was zhere too and 'Arry is telling you zhe truth," Fleur concurred, "though 'e is being too 'umble about 'is part in zhe battle."

The blood drained from Madame Bones's face.

Sirius, who had picked up the paper, flipped it over and pointed to the front page, which was an eerily still picture of Hogwarts showing the dead bodies of Death Eaters. "We need to make some fast decisions. In the last war, one of the biggest problems was the infiltration of the Ministry and the subsequent neutralization of the DMLE, specifically the Hit Wizards and the Aurors. We don't have time to be bugging about, war is coming again and we need to know how many of them are on our side."

"Is the Order starting up again?" Madame Bones asked.

"I haven't thought about it, but it should if we can find enough members. The DMLE and specifically the Auror's department is a good place to start, at least the ones we can trust."

"Count me in," Madame Bones agreed. "Last time, I spied for the Order, so I couldn't be an official member for obvious reasons. Not this time. As for the Aurors, count on your cousin Nymphadora Tonks, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Daniel Proudfoot, Gawain Robards, and Gary Williamson joining immediately."

"How certain are you of their loyalty?" Remus questioned.

"They were dispatched to the graveyard and the school once we found out. This morning they came back ready rip the countryside apart looking for Death Eaters. One of our day-shift Aurors caught them casting battle-shield charms on their body armor and dispensing with backup wand holsters for second primary holsters. It took the entire day-shift of Aurors and a frantic call to the Hit-Wizards next door before they were physically restrained.

Sirius smirked, thinking about his cousin. "How'd Tonks do?"

"Four hit wizards, three Aurors, and two secretaries, though one of the secretaries got jinxed for calling her Nymphadora. Two of the three Aurors were night-shift Aurors even, but had already calmed down."

"How did she manage that?" Remus asked, remembering a cute toddler that absolutely adored Sirius.

"She morphed into the form of Hagrid. It was a tense five minutes."

"Hagrid?" Sirius threw his head back and guffawed.

"She only calmed down when Shacklebolt and I faced her down. Too much respect for us, I guess, though you couldn't tell by her mouth – or her two-fingered gestures."

"Nice to see Tonks has found a way to channel the Black heritage in a positive manner." Sirius smiled.

"She did well this morning too." Madame Bones continued. "Armed with the memories of Neville Longbottom, she found—"

"Neville's alive?" interrupted Harry.

Madame Bones took it in stride. "He is. Last night he saw Moody kill the heads of Durmstrang and Beauxbatans as they looked for the Champions."

"Madame Maxime!" Fleur gasped.

Harry forgot all about Neville and went to Fleur immediately. He reached around her with one arm and put his other hand on the back of her head, gently pulling her into his body and supporting her so she wouldn't fall to the ground. Fleur wrapped her arms around him tightly, leaned her head against his bare chest, and cried.

Harry swore an oath as he held her, someone was going to pay with their life for making this demigod of beauty break down in tears; preferably, many "someones". His arms flexed and the muscles around his jaw hardened. The private oath fed his anger, which in turn empowered his magic even more.

After a couple minutes had passed, Fleur let go of Harry and stepped back. "Zhank you. I'll be fine," she whispered, wiping away tears and forcing a smile for him. She walked out of the room and back up the stairs.

Harry followed to the bottom of the staircase to make sure she was okay. After being assured she was, he detoured into the sitting room and pick up the shirt Mrs. Weasley had given him to wear. Before putting it on, he noticed the remains of Fleur's tears still running down his chest. He watched as they glistened in the light and refused to dry them, knowing they belonged there.

Of course they did, he thought. After all, it was ultimately his fault. It was Harry that Voldemort was after. Regardless of what Fleur said, he did suggest all four Champions take the cup. Had Harry taken it alone, Fleur and Madame Maxime could have apparated away as soon as the fighting began and the wards were broken.

The logic was terrible and Harry didn't account for the fact that the three other Champions would have stayed and fought. But that was normal; he was used to thinking he was at fault for everything that went wrong.

Harry pulled his shirt over his head and went back into the kitchen.

"Is Fleur okay?" Sirius asked.

"I'm not sure. She had to have known."

"Knowing it and hearing it confirmed, are vastly different," Remus reminded him.

Harry nodded, then peered up at Madame Bones. "You were saying Professor Moody killed them?"

"That's what we thought. But when we went back there later this morning, we found the body of Crouch Jr., with Moody's eye and wooden leg next to him—"

"But he's dead!" Sirius interrupted. "I was down the corridor from him in Azkaban. I watched them take the body out of his cell."

"And you were supposed to be a Muggle-murderer, remember?" the head of DMLE reminded him. "I don't know whose body was carried out of his cell, but I saw Crouch Jr. with my own eyes this morning. It was him, with a flask of Polyjuice potion lashed to his side. Anyway, it took them an hour, but Tonks found Moody locked up in the trunk in his office, or more accurately, she tripped over the trunk and heard him yell. Either way, Moody is right miffed at being held in there all year."

"I would think so," Sirius interjected. "Where is he now, and Minerva?"

"They're back at my house."

"Good. I'm going to assume they'll be part of the Order again."

"I would think so," Madame Bones agreed. "When do you want to have the first meeting?"

"As soon as possible, tomorrow night if we can find a place," Remus answered.

Mrs. Weasley rolled her eyes and entered the conversation. "What do you mean find a place? We'll have it at the Burrow."

"I'm not sure about that," Sirius interjected. "Death Eaters have to know that Harry is here. If they are watching and see known Order members from the first war arriving, all hell'll break loose."

"Why would anyone believe I would want to stay at the house of my second dead family?" Harry asked. "Most probably think I am back

at my relatives under the blood wards, or out of the country with Fleur by now."

Four sets of adult eyes widened at the statement. "The boy's got good point," Madame Bones agreed.

"How many people know how you feel about your relatives?" Sirius asked.

"Now? Outside of Neville, probably only the people in this room."

Sirius acquiesced. "Alright, we'll have it here tomorrow, but I think we're foolish to push it beyond that."

"We can talk about that at the meeting," Mrs. Weasley said, effectively ending the discussion.

"How's Neville doing?" Remus asked. "I have to admit I'm surprised he made it through last night. I know he wouldn't have run, but while in my class, he didn't seem to have the aptitude to battle against Death Eaters either."

"I think he's okay," Cho answered. "Or at least as okay as we are. I spoke with him just before we came. He's with Su Li, protecting the last of the Firsties."

Harry pulled his eyebrows together. "Protecting?"

"Yeah," Susan spoke up. "It seems he found his magic last night."

"How did he do that?" Harry wanted to know.

"Do you know his story, Harry?" Madame Bones asked.

"I know about his parents, if that is what you are asking."

"Do you know who did it?"

"No."

"Barty Crouch Jr., and three others, all of whom were there last night. It is not unheard of that when faced with such an emotional situation,

especially when it results in anger, magic gets channeled in ways it never has before. It's the same basic reason for accidental magic."

"That makes sense," Remus surmised. "He spent a lot of extra time with me learning how to do spells. He knew them, he just couldn't push enough magic into them. I guess whatever was holding his magic back, let go last night."

"I'd say," Susan remarked. "He still tripped over his feet a few times, but he fought two Death Eaters by himself when a group of Firsties came running out of the wrong side of the Quidditch stands."

"I saw that too," said Mrs. Weasley. "Neville fought like a possessed wizard. He reminded me so much of his father last night. Frank would have been very proud of his son."

She stopped and rubbed her eyes. "Come, let me make some lunch and we can sit down. There's still much to discuss. Harry, why don't you take these two young woman into the sitting room," she suggested.

"I think I owe Cho a few words in private, first. If that's okay."

Mrs. Weasley nodded and went to work in the kitchen.

Harry steered Cho to the sitting room. They sat on the settee, leaving a couple feet between them. "I thought you should know," he started, but found he couldn't say anything else.

Cho waited patiently.

"It's about Cedric. He. . . ."

She closed her eyes and cried softly. "He's dead, I thought so."

Harry nodded, still not able to speak. Somehow, it felt natural to comfort Fleur, he knew exactly what to do. It didn't hurt that she had comforted him in the cave last night, either. But Cho? What was he to do now? How did he end up here, trying to figure out a way to comfort someone who had rejected him, and doing it because the person he was rejected for, died saving him. Can my world get any more twisted about?



Cho's voice brought him back to the moment. "I thought all four of you were dead." She cried harder and Harry, not knowing what else to do, reached out to her. She slid across the settee and put both arms around him, holding him tightly and crying on his neck. He ended up wrapping his arms around her and holding her as she cried. And there's another twist. Ask a stupid question. . . .

"He was brave, Cho. If it wasn't for him, Voldemort would've killed me."

Cho pulled back. "I – I don't want to believe he's back. He's going to go after you again, isn't he?"

Harry couldn't help but notice the worried look she gave him, nor the renewed tears.

X O X O X O X

Neither could Fleur, who was sitting at the top of the stairs.

Sirius, who had excused himself to the bathroom when they sat down for tea, walked by her on his way back down the stairs. "Anything wrong?" he asked.

"No. Why?"

"Because you look like my mother when my father set off for work. Trust me, that's not a compliment."

"What do you mean?"

"She hated him going to work."

"Why would she 'ave a problem with zhat?"

Sirius chuckled. "My father worked with a number of gorgeous witches like the young beauty on the settee with Harry."

"E's only fourteen." She replied curtly, laughing at the idea that someone could think she liked Harry in that way.

"Alright, I just wanted to make sure you were okay," he said, before heading back down the stairs.

Fleur couldn't resist watching Harry as he comforted the young witch, thinking about him doing the same for her just a few minutes before, and pondering the dichotomy that was Harry Potter. Fleur had been thinking long and hard about the books she'd seen the night before and didn't like any of the conclusions she came to, especially since the two adults closest to Harry had warned her that he could easily slip into the Dark Arts before he fulfilled the prophecy – though it wasn't said in those words. Yet here he was, tender and caring, comforting a young witch that had turned him down for the Yule Ball.

Fleur remembered how she thought it funny that Harry didn't have a date for that night until almost the very end; at the time, it was more proof that Harry was just a boy with a scar and a hard luck story, not special like her.

Fleur sighed at the memory and quietly went up the next flight of stairs to Ginny's bedroom. She sat on the bed, ashamed of herself, ashamed of how she had treated Harry at the beginning of the year, and ashamed of how she had treated his friends.

True, she was sick of teenage (and adult) wizards being dumbstruck by her whenever she passed by, but could she blame them? When was the last time they saw someone as beautiful as her?

Mon Dieu, je suis incroyablement arrogant!

Since when, was arrogance ever beautiful? she asked herself in response. Never, She answered, and that meant she wasn't beautiful either. Sure, the Veela might be, but Fleur was far from it. If someone ever got passed the Veela magic and the looks, what would they find? What would be beautiful about her then? What if a blind wizard ever sat down to speak with her, what would he find beautiful about her? The questions raced through Fleur's mind unbidden, and unanswered. Worse, the more she dug to find an answer, the emptier she felt. How could she have let herself come to this?

A half-hour later, spent from the self-interrogation, Fleur curled in on herself, hugging the uncomfortable pillow. She lifted it up to fluff it, and found something stuffed inside the pillowcase.

It was a small book bound together with string. Every page was a letter addressed to Harry. At first she put it down on the dresser. But after a few minutes, the compulsion to read it overcame her.

~ . ~ . ~

5 October, 1990

Dear Harry Potter,

My name is Ginerva Weasley, but please don't call me that. I go by Ginny. Do you like to be called any other name? My older brothers call Ron (he's the youngest brother) many names, but I don't think he likes any of them.

My mummy told me the story how you saved everyone from Boldevort. I'm sad you lost your mummy and daddy. I fight with my brothers a lot. But I would cry very much if anything happened to them, or my mummy and daddy.

I guess I should say thank you for saving most of my family. Mummy says my two Uncles died because of Boldevort, but I didn't know them.

I hope we can meet someday.

Ginny.

~ . ~ . ~

Fleur drew her hand across the writing, feeling the imprint of the quill in the pages. There was something so innocent, so pure about this Ginny's concern for Harry. It stood in stark contrast to what she'd seen from many of the students towards Harry those first months last fall. It also further highlighted Her own attitude towards Harry. Quickly, she flipped a few more pages and began reading before thinking too much on that subject again.

~ . ~ . ~

01 September, 1991

Dear Harry Potter

I SAW YOU TODAY HARRY!

You were at the train station and didn't know how to get to Platform Nine and Three-Quarters. You met my mum and brother Ron. I hope you like him. He can be a prat (don't tell mum I said that, she thinks I'm too "mouthy," whatever that means), but he's still one of my favorite brothers.

I'm sorry I hid behind mum when I saw you, but I didn't know what else to do! You looked lost, and a little scared. (Cute too!) But I don't believe you were scared. How can you be scared after facing Voldevort? I even saw the scar. Did you know you keep trying to cover it up? I bet you didn't even know you were trying to. Mum says my brothers try and do that to their freckles, but I think she means their hair is just getting too long.

I hope you have a good year at Hogwarts this year. Next year, I will be old enough to go too. I am so excited!

Ginny.

~ . ~ . ~

Fleur smiled, then laughed, wishing that she could have gotten to know the young girl, instead of keeping her distance all year. Now, the only memories she had of this Ginny was Harry carrying her small, dead body across the grounds, tripping over the bloodied remains of his friends while crying-

Quickly, Fleur turned a few more pages and began reading before the memories came flooding back.

~ . ~ . ~

31 August, 1992

Dear Harry Potter.

It is weird writing this letter to you when you are sleeping three floors up! I can't believe you're staying in my house. I know it's not much, we get made fun of because we don't have much money. But I

wouldn't trade it for anything. I love it here because it's home. I hope you feel like this is home too.

I'm glad my brothers broke you out of that house. Why did your Uncle bar the window and lock your door from the outside? Ron says they fed you through a little hole cut into it. Mum is miffed about how skinny you are. She says they barely fed you. Ron's told us before that they make you cook for everyone else and let your cousin beat you up and that they don't care about you. He also says you didn't get any real Christmas presents from them, and never have. . .

. . . Fleur was appalled. The savior of the wizarding world was treated like trash. How could they ignore him, shunt him off to the side, and not care about him? How could I? She covered her face and cried, her heart rending apart. 'Ow many have others have I treated like 'Arry? 'Ow many others 'ave I dismissed without a thought about zhem? 'Ow. . . 'ow many others 'ave I 'urt with mon arrogance?

Once again, question after question raced through her mind. But, after an interminable amount of time, her thoughts cleared and she was able to pinpoint where these changes began; the second task.

Maybe no one else could tell, but in hindsight, Fleur knew that something was different. The potential loss of Gabrielle shocked her into realizing how important some things were and in relation, how many other things weren't so important. She couldn't remember the last time she had complained about Hogwarts. Sure, she still had her judgments, but even those were more out of habit now. She'd even begun to go out of her way to say hi to Harry, sorry for how she treated him earlier in the year.

Except, none of that explained why she was she having one epiphany after another today. What was happening to her? Even as she asked the question, she knew the answer. I'm changing. What I saw last night, what I experienced, what I learned about 'Arry's life and mine in comparison, has caused me to change.

The thought shocked Fleur, and she was quickly shocked again when she came to understand what the change was. I'm starting to care about people!

The last epiphany however, led straight to another question. When did I stop caring? It wasn't like she grew up that way. As a little girl, she was extremely empathetic toward others, including the time when she was four and punched a boy for making her friend cry, then cried because she made the boy cry by punching him.

Fleur smiled at the memory. When did that stop, puberty? Or at least the Veela version of it? That's when everyone else's reactions to her changed, so she shut them out and stopped caring.

Fleur took a deep breath, emotionally and physically exhausted. She picked Ginny's letters back up and finished the one she was reading before putting them away.

Harry, I am sorry no one else cares for you. If it helps, I do. I love you, and I promise you I will love you even if no one else does. (oh bollocks, thank you Merlin I'm not EVER going to send this to Harry. IF ONE OF MY BROTHERS IS READING THIS, I'LL BAT BOGEY HEX YOUR ARSE OFF!)

~ . ~ . ~

The letters hit the mattress and Fleur snatched up the pillow, pushing it against her face to stifle the laughter.

X O X O X O X

"I hope I didn't upset your witchfriend," Cho said to Harry downstairs about the same time.

"Witchfriend?"

"Don't be coy, Harry."

"I don't—"

Cho was surprised at the lost look on Harry's face. "You mean you're not?"

"I don't know what you're even talking about!" Harry responded, a little frustration showing through.

Cho giggled. "Now I think I know why you didn't ask me out, even though I flirted with you during our Quidditch match last year."

"Sorry?"

"When I cut you off and like a gentlemen, you swerved out of the way instead of hitting me and grabbing the snitch. Do you remember how I smiled at you when Wood was yelling for you to knock me off my broom?"

"Yeah," Harry gave her a small smile.

"I waited outside the locker rooms to congratulate you that night, but you were with the rest of your House. Then there just never seemed to be the right time. The rest of that year I hoped that you would approach me, but you never did. This year, I was hoping you would asked me to the Yule Ball, I even said no to Cedric originally. But I finally decided that you didn't like me, so I agreed to go with him instead."

"Oh."

Susan, having come in after Harry finished telling Cho about Cedric, piped up. "It's probably a good thing Harry has no clue when it comes to witches. Could you imagine him if he actually knew and acted on the fact that half the witches at school fancied him?"

"What?"

Cho laughed. "Harry, if you're going to spend time with witches, you have to work on giving more than one-word answers."

"Why?" Susan retorted. "I doubt talking was a priority for the witches that wanted to get him into the broom closet – especially for a couple of the Seventh Years."

Harry blushed something fierce.

"And they were very pretty, including the one from Slytherin," Cho clarified.

"Oh bog off, now you're just taking the mickey out of me."

"Oh?" Susan said, "I heard the Slytherin girl is working at Fortescues' ice cream parlor this summer. She made it through last night, actually helped us in the beginning. Take a trip to Diagon Alley and pop in to say hi this summer. I'm sure she'd love to . . . serve you."

The last two words, delivered with a sultry voice and little shake of the head left Harry looking like a Hippogriff caught in the headlights of an oncoming train.

Cho giggled again. "You really are a neophyte when it comes to witches, aren't you?"

"Neo-what?"

"Neophyte, a beginner," Cho informed him. "You're completely lost. Okay, getting back to our original topic, let me help. If I am reading all the signs correctly – though I'm no Trelawney–"

Cho's Seeker skills came in handy as she caught a pillow just before it hit her in the head.

After sticking her tongue out at Susan, Cho started again. "Okay Harry, follow me. When a witch stares at another witch when the second said witch is touching a wizard, that's a sign. When first said witch is comfortable enough to cry on said wizard's shoulder and holds said wizard as said witch does, that's a possible sign. When said witch sits at the top of the stairs and watches said wizard comfort second said witch much like the first said witch, with a look of malice, that's a third sign.

"Now, like I said, I'm no Trelawney" – Cho checked to make sure the air was clear of pillows – "but guessing at the signs, I'd say the whole thing should be rated at possible to probable."

"The whole what?" Harry asked, utterly confused. "What is possible to probable? What signs? What are you talking about?"

Cho looked at Susan, gobsmacked and Susan shook her head at the idiocy of wizards.

"Are you ready girls?" Madame Bones asked from the table on the other side of the wall.



"Sure," Susan answered. The three of them stood up. Susan walked over and surprised Harry by giving him a hug and kissing him on the cheek. "I never apologized for the stupid stuff I said two years ago, or for my part in the 'Potter Stinks' campaign this year."

"Don't worry about it," Harry mumbled.

"I shouldn't have done it. There are only a few of us at Hogwarts who knows what's its like to lose our family. I can't imagine what it must have felt like to have most of the school turn on you as well. . . twice, actually. I really am sorry Harry."

"I don't know what to say," Harry finally admitted. "Thank you, I guess."

But Susan understood. The corners of her lips pulled up. "She is gorgeous, by the way."

"Who?"

Susan shook her head and walked away laughing. Cho hugged Harry as well, careful to not hurt his chest. She took his head in her hands and tilted it down just enough to look directly into his eyes. "I am glad I dated Cedric. He was a good wizard and very caring. But I am sorry I didn't seek you out after the night of our match last year. I would have loved to spend many evenings watching the sun set with you."

She leaned in and kissed him softly. "Please don't succumb to Gryffindor stupidity and go rushing into danger."

"Gryffindor stupidity, what do you mean?" Harry asked, a little surprised, and miffed if Cho read it right.

"Most of your Housemates could have made it safely out of the battle. But they chose to run toward the oncoming Death Eaters. They all gave their lives to protect the younger ones."

"So did your House. I saw their bodies in the trees. I know you stayed to help as well."

"The difference is, if you were there, I know you would have been in the very front." She paused before starting again. "But it's just you now. Ron isn't with you to get into trouble and Hermione isn't there to bail you out. I don't want to even think what would happen to you if Death Eaters caught you."

Biting her lip she turned to leave, and saw Fleur standing at the bottom of the stairs. Cho walked up to her and whispered into her ear, "Please take care of him."

"Girls, let's go! We need to be home before it gets dark." Madame Bones called out a second time.

Susan walked into the kitchen, followed by Fleur and a now bemused Cho, who, from the look on Fleur's face, knew that neither one of them had any idea how they possibly felt towards each other. It was Ron and Hermione all over again, and everyone at the school but them saw their spats for what they were.

"Ms. Delacour, have you let your father know you are safe?" Madame Bones asked once Fleur was in the kitchen.

"Non, I thought about sending a Patronus, but it wouldn't make it zhat far. I don't 'ave an owl and zhere's no way I'm making zheir owl fly across zhe Mange. According to Molly, it'd probably end up drowning in zhe ocean."

The head of DMLE drew her cloak around herself. "I'll try to get word to your father through the Ministry. You also need to know that according to International Wizarding Statutes, all foreign wizards and witches are entitled to create or have a Portkey created without prosecution during time of conflict. Since you are decidedly not a pure-blood and I fear we are at the beginning of a second pure-blood war, I suggest you do it soon, whether you decide to stay or not. If the Ministry falls, the Portkey will still be operative, but if you wait, my replacement in a new Ministry will have the power to create wards that stop the creation of Portkeys.

"I fear what they would do to a beautiful young foreign witch like you who isn't a pure-blood. Do you understand what I am saying?"

"Oui, Madamemoiselle, I understand. Would I be zhe only one zhat can use it?"

"No. Anyone acting as a protector could Portkey with you to see you safely home" – she turned to Harry – "especially if that person is targeted as well."

"Zhen I will do it as soon as you leave, zhank you."

The three witches walked out the back door to the apparition point. Sirius, Remus, and Harry walked with them to the back fence, and watched them Disapparate.

"That was an interesting visit," Remus said as he started back towards the Burrow.

"I'd say. Never did find out how she knew I was here."

"The dog smell?" Harry asked, then took off running as Sirius transfigured back into a dog and gave chase.

Looking out the back window, Fleur was getting as much enjoyment watching them as they.

Unbeknownst to her, Molly was leaning against the counter, watching Fleur watching them, and smiling herself.

Mothers always know.

A/N Alright, I'm going to stop here for now and no cliffhanger either! This chapter originally had another four thousand words before it ended. But I decided to push those to the next chapter and keep this one about the visit of Madame Bones.

Also, take note of the introduction of a main secondary character who wasn't seen here, but talked about. He's going to become important later on.

I noticed that in my last author's note, I forgot to provide the title to my D.A. fic. Real smart! It's "The Dark Domination: The Rise of Dumbledore's Army." It's a bit more of an organized uprising against the Death Eaters, than a ragtag group of students, and it has numerous pairings, a number of darker moments, and quite a bit of humor.

Future Chapters: I'm coming to the end of the fleshed out chapters. That's because I've condensed a couple, and changed the story enough that I need to do some more writing to fill in some gaps in others. My target is to update once a month at the very least, probably once every two weeks, unless something goes haywire in life.

I haven't decided if there will be one or two more chapters in Part 1. (BTW, there are three parts to the story). But part 1 should be coming to a close pretty soon, then we're off to France where, yes, we get to meet Gabrielle, the parents, and a few others.

I do hope you're enjoying the journey. If so, please leave me a review and let me know. If not, let me know why.

Speaking of reviews:

Zucht: LOL, hope you enjoyed chapter 4. You almost guilted me into posting it earlier today. . . almost.

Twistyguru: Annnd here's another chapter of Fleur's development!

Exnavybrat89: For the love of Walt Disney: ROTFL. Hope you enjoyed the chapter. Oh, and since you are an ex-navy brat, please pass along my thanks your father's or mother's service. Why do my Canucks alway choke in the Cup finals?

Agouraki: Hope your questions about going to the Burrow have been answered. If not, PM me. I'll give you my reasons, listen to yours, and have a great time doing it.

Nicks244: LOL. Yeah, dark fics without humor is just depressing. This fic is going to get quite a bit darker before the light, but, I plan to include humor throughout.

ILikeComps: Alright, I have to ask. Does comps= computers, or does comps= Comprehensive exams? The first I can agree too, the latter, I'm facing in a semester or two and think your sick in the head if you like 'em ;)

Lover and Protector: If you think that's sad, go read my "Aftermath" fic. I only have 5 chapters up, since I started a prequel. It might not do anything for you, but I still have a hard time reading it. Worse yet,

check out my buddy "Theelderwand1" and his fic "Stop All The Clocks." It's brutally tear jerking at the end, IMO. But he had an entire universe built up after that helps out afterward.

To Everyone Else: Thanks again for the reviews. They are wonderful. I know a few of you commented on the cliffhangers. There will be a few here and there from this point on. But, it'll come down, until the two chapters before the last chapter and epilogue. I may have to go into hiding!

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE REALITY AHEAD

Finished chasing each other around the yard an hour or so later, Sirius put his arm around Harry's shoulders as they walked back to the Burrow.

"Thanks for coming to my defense today, but if you ever do it again, I'll curse you myself."

"What else was I supposed to do?"

Sirius rolled his eyes and muttered something about Harry being just like James again. But as they reached the back door, he put his hand out, stopping Harry from going inside.

When Harry looked up at his godfather, he saw the adoration that had been missing from his life. He knew instinctively that this was the same way his father would have look at him.

"There are very few people in this world that have the ability to comfort others the way you did today, after all you've been through. Your mother would be unbelievably proud. I think your father would've as well, though he'd be just as proud of the fact that it was two beautiful witches you were comforting."

Remus snorted.

"Might as well do it while I still can," Harry thought, not realizing he said it out loud.

"What was that?" Remus asked.

"Nothing."

"Harry," Sirius growled at him.

The two adults looked at each other before Sirius started again. "I want to know what you meant by that."

At first, Harry was reticent to tell them about the Horcruxes, but he had to talk with someone and if he trusted anyone, it was these two.

They had the privileged position of being both friends and adults, rather than just authority figures; Sirius much more than Remus, but nevertheless. . .

Harry let out a breath. "It's something I saw in Dumbledore's office. He gave me a memory to look at."

"And?" Sirius prodded.

"Do you know what 'Horcruxes' are?" he finally asked.

"Can't say that I do," Sirius answered. "How about you, Remus?"

"Haven't heard of them."

Harry walked back to the picnic table and sat down. The other two followed, eyeing each other warily. When they reached the table, Harry asked Remus to put up a spell to stop anyone from listening.

"It's done. Now what's on your mind?"

"No one can hear?"

"No one," Remus assured Harry.

"Okay. Do you know how Voldemort is still alive?"

"Nobody really knows."

"I do. I helped him."

"You can't blame yourself," Sirius reminded him. "They bound you and took your blood."

"That's not what I mean. I helped keep him alive the last thirteen years." He definitely had their attention now.

"You're going to tell me everything you know about this, right now," Sirius commanded. "If we want to stop Voldemort, every piece of information is crucial."

Harry realized he was right and began to explain.

"Voldemort made Horcruxes. 'A Horcrux is a piece of the soul placed into something else for safekeeping,'" Harry quoted one of the books he read back in the library. "In order to make one, you split your soul and put half of it into something else – no, that's not right. You actually crack your soul into a bunch of pieces and put one of those pieces into something else."

"How exactly does that happen?" asked Remus again.

"Murder. According to what I read over Dumbledore's shoulder in the memory, when a wizard murders someone, the soul cracks. The books say it will heal over time, depending on how remorseful you are. So, if you want to make a Horcrux, you murder someone and crack your soul, then use Dark Magic to put part of it into an object. Until the object is destroyed, you can never be killed because part of your soul is always safe. That's what Voldemort did. It was his Horcruxes that kept him from dying."

Remus sat down on the bench. "I notice you're using the plural."

"Yeah, Dumbledore figured that he created at least one of them on purpose and a second one on accident."

"Accident?"

"Yep. An accidental Horcrux happens when a Horcrux has been created, then before the soul has a chance to heal itself, that person murders someone else in the presence of very strong magic."

"Blood wards," Sirius whispered. "That's what you meant by helping him live. You're telling us that you're the accidental Horcrux?"

"Dumbledore thought that was why my scar hurt."

"And the other one?" Remus asked.

Harry noticed that he seemed to have aged from the conversation.

"I destroyed it years ago, before I even knew what it was, so there is one left to destroy." he pointed to his head.

"Where in the BLOODY HELL did you learn this tripe?" Sirius demanded, forgetting that Harry had just told him.



"Like I said, a book. It was in Dumbledore's office. I saw it in one of the memories he showed me."

"Books concerning the Dark Arts are just as often wrong in the particulars as they are right," Remus reminded Harry.

"It seemed to work for Voldemort, didn't it? Dumbledore believed it too."

"So you're telling me that in order for Voldemort to die, you must die too?" Sirius asked, bordering on outrage.

"It looks that way, unless there is another way that Dumbledore didn't know."

"Bugg—"

Remus quickly cast a second spell, limiting them from hearing Sirius's expletive binge. "Let's go inside. Sirius will come in when he's finished. I've seen him last like this for three quarters of an hour, and they're words you don't need to learn for a very long time."

Harry nodded and started walking back to the Burrow. Remus caught up with him and whispered, "Don't worry Harry. Once Sirius calms down, we're going to find out what this is all about and figure out a different way for you to get this. . . Horcrux out of your head."

"Thanks." He smiled at Remus, but it was only for his former professor's benefit. Harry knew what his future held. If it ran true to his past, there could only be one path. He again would have to make a sacrifice so others could go on about their life.

Harry didn't know the phrase "Passover lamb," but that was exactly what he believed of himself. He would have to die so that death would pass over others. Some might even call it a messiah complex, but that wouldn't be right. At age fourteen, Harry just thought that was how things were.

X O X O X O X

Dinner was a quiet affair. The reality of the last twenty-four hours settled over the Burrow like a winter fog that permeated through the skin, leaching away warmth and comfort.

"How are you coping, Harry?" Mrs. Weasley asked.

"I don't know. I feel like my insides are about to explode, it hurts so much, and a bit later, I'm laughing and carrying on like nothing happened. I feel guilty for laughing and that makes me feel like my insides are about to explode again."

"Good," She said, surprising Harry. "Believe it or not, that's normal." She ladled more stew into his bowl. "Everyone deals with death differently. Some laugh and make jokes about it, others cry and mourn, and still others do neither or both. What do you think the twins would be doing right now to deal with their grief?"

Harry thought about it for a few seconds. "I don't know, maybe find whoever did it and make one of their pranks accidentally go wrong."

"Possible," she allowed, and refilled Fleur's bowl over her muted protests. "However, I think they'd be in here with those blasted stink bombs and whatever it was that left feathers all over their room last summer, maybe even a few fireworks. Could you see them doing that?"

Harry gazed off into the kitchen, remembering the first time he was there. The twins and Ron were in trouble for taking the flying car to break him out of the Dursley's house. Entering the back door, the Burrow felt so much more like a home should feel. The biggest difference wasn't the mess, the chaos, or anything else such as that. It was a mum that loved her children.

He thought about the twins teasing Mrs. Weasley about fancying Lockhart and de-gnoming the garden that day. Whatever the situation, they had a joke or prank for it, including trying to cheer him up with the Marauder's map and other types of mischief over the last couple years at school. They did it that way because it was their nature.

"Yeah," Harry finally answered. "They'd probably take it as a challenge to make everyone laugh."

"Would that have meant they didn't care about their father or sister or brothers?"

"No," he admitted. "But I still don't feel right being able to laugh after their deaths."

"Neither did we." Sirius pushed his stew away. "But in the first war, your father, Remus and I quickly learned that it's more important to feel something, than nothing at all. Anything you feel right now, is the right thing to feel, regardless of whether it's having fun, being sad, or even anger. It's only when you don't feel anything, that you need to worry, okay?"

Harry tried to process that, but it didn't make sense. "So it's okay to act as if I could care less that my two best mates are dead?"

"That's not what he's saying," Remus cut in. "When you were talking with Cho on the couch, Susan Bones was in here crying so hard she almost hyperventilated. We had to put up a couple spells so she wouldn't interrupt you. But by the time you were finished comforting Cho, Susan was able to tease you about taking witches into a broom closet. Dealing with death is like that. It's like chasing a snitch and you just have to go with it."

"But—"

Sirius leaned in to make sure he had Harry's full attention. "Remember, the only death you are familiar with, happened when you were a baby. This is going to be different."

"I guess so."

Mrs. Weasley reached over and pulled him into a hug. "I cried for hours last night. Then this morning when you came through the door, I was the ecstatic. This evening however, when you came through the same door and Ron wasn't with you, I went back into my room and cried for an hour. But that doesn't mean I didn't have fun today. I really enjoyed smacking your godfather around this morning at breakfast."

"That's always fun," Remus quipped, and smacked Sirius on the back of the head. A moment later, the two of them were chasing

each other around the Burrow and casting jinxes everywhere. Harry and the two witches hid behind shield charms and laughed.

X O X O X O X

Later that night, they were all in the sitting room. Sirius was still twitching from a particularly nasty jinx.

"Molly, you wouldn't happen to have a shirt I could sleep in, would you?" Fleur asked.

"Sure. I'd offer you one of my nightgowns, but my own daughter swore she'd never wear one. She said it made me look like 'a cow with a hip engorgement charm'."

Sirius laughed, spraying butterbeer all over himself. "Damn it, Molly!"

She pulled out her wand and cleaned it up in one pass. "Arthur spewed Firewhisky across the room when she said it."

"Spew?" Harry repeated.

"Yeah, he—" Molly began, but was cut off by Harry.

"No, SPEW. I can't believe I forgot about the House Elves!"

"But I don't have a house-elf," Molly grumbled, confused by the change in conversation.

"No, the house-elves at Hogwarts. How could I go all day without finding out if Dobby and Winky are alive? I have to go back there."

"NO!" three voices shouted at the same time.

"What is so special about zhis 'ouse-elf?" Fleur asked.

"He's my friend. He tried to help me a couple years ago." Harry left out the part about how Dobby had tried to help him. It was some of the most painful help Harry had every received, but he was still grateful.

"If 'e is bound to you, zhen just call 'is name and 'e will 'ear you."

"But he isn't bound to me. He's a free elf."

"You can still try. If 'e likes you zhat much, 'e may still 'ear you."

"Really?"

"You've nothing to lose," Sirius answered. "Might as well try."

Harry looked back and forth between Fleur and Sirius. They were both watching him with expressions that alternated between awe at his ability to care for others and sadness at another potential loss.

"Dobby!" Harry called, without much conviction, but to his surprise, the house-elf appeared in the Burrow.

"Harry Potter is alive?"

"I am." Harry laughed and slid down to the floor, bracing himself for what was coming. Dobby ran at him, slamming into him and throwing his arms around Harry's neck.

"Dobby be glad Harry Potter lives. Dobby thought Harry Potter. . . that Harry Potter had. . ."

"It's okay, Dobby. I didn't. How are you and Winky?"

Dobby's eyes widened to twice their normal size. "Dobby should learn not to be surprised by the greatness of Harry Potter. He even asks about house-elves after the terrible battle."

"Of course I would, Dobby. You're my friend. I want to know if you're okay."

"Dobby is honored by Harry Potter. Dobby and Winky is okay."

A change came over Dobby and his demeanor was one of such hatred, Fleur caught herself reaching for her wand.

"Bad, bad wizards come. They saying Harry Potter is dead and they be killing Dumbledore. But already sir, we know about Dumbledore, yes we did. We be house-elves. We know when master dies."

"Master?" Harry interrupted.

"Yes, Harry Potter. Even if he pays Dobby, Dobby considers him master while working there because he is great wizard like Harry Potter. But the bad wizards be killing master and want to live at Hogwarts. We don't let them, sir, not at all."

"What do you mean," Harry asked.

"House-elves are powerful in magic. More than wizards believe. Wards and bonding to families limited magic, but Dumbledore freed house-elf magic, yes he did." Dobby's eyes narrowed and a feral grin appeared. It was the most dangerous Harry had ever seen the elf. "It comes as nasty surprise to bad wizards in masks and black robes. They not be trying that again for a while."

Sirius whistled. "A brassed off house-elf with freed magic is a terror to behold."

Molly and Remus nodded in agreement while Fleur sat there stunned. She'd never thought of house-elves as anything more than servants. Of course, she treated them nicely. But the idea of befriending one, or the concept of a free house-elf fighting for a wizard never crossed her mind.

"Be careful, Dobby." Harry warned him. "There's no need for you to get hurt in a stupid wizarding war."

"Dobby is free elf and friends with Harry Potter because he is a great wizard and freed Dobby from bad master. Dobby chooses to fight on the side of Harry Potter. Does sir call me to discuss strategy, or does Harry Potter have something for me to do?" he asked, bouncing on his heels in anticipation.

Fleur sat quietly on the settee, watching the unbound house-elf treat Harry like he was a beloved master. It was just one more piece in a very strange puzzle.

"I was wondering if you wouldn't mind getting our stuff from school," Harry asked. "Oh, and could you tell my owl, Hedwig, that I'm at the Burrow. She'll know where it is."

Dobby's face lit up. "Thank you Harry Potter. I do it right away." Before Harry could say another word, the elf disappeared.

Fleur laughed. "Is everyday like zhis for 'Arry Potter?"

Harry slid back into his chair. "What do you mean?"

"Arry Potter," she mimicked Dobby again, "since zhis morning; sir has been at wand point once; told off zhe 'ead of a major government ministry; 'ad two pretty witches kiss you, one on zhe lips; and two witches crying on your shoulder; and 'ad a 'ouse-elf that is not bound to you, worship zhe ground you walk on."

"Let's not forget," Sirius tagged on, "that Harry Potter woke up next to a beautiful young witch this morning as well."

"Zhat's right! 'E was even using me as a pillow!"

Harry would have rather played Quidditch naked than sitting in the Burrow at that moment.

X O X O X O X

Fleur levitated Harry's trunk up the stairs an hour later.

Once in the room, Harry opened his trunk and took out clothes for the night. "I'm going to take a shower, do you—"

"I 'ope you're not inviting me to shower with you? What kind of witch do you zhink I am?" Fleur teased.

Harry turned bright red (again).

She decided to let him off the hook. "Zhanks for the warning 'Arry, but no. I don't need zhe bathroom." Fleur walked back down the stairs, turning pink and questioning why she would even think to say such a thing to him.

Back in the sitting room, she noticed a picture of Harry and the other Gryffindors from his year, lying on the table. She picked it up and studied it.

"Remus, you were 'Arry's professor last year, no?" she asked after a few minutes.

"I was, what is on your mind?"

"Could you tell me who zhis is?"

Remus leaned over and looked. "That's Neville Longbottom."

"Why does 'e look like 'Arry?"

"What do you mean? I thought they looked nothing alike."

"Physically, no. But a Veela learns to always look at body language and facial expressions, especially around zhe eyes. Because of our abilities, we must be able to determine when a wizard is in control of 'imself, or when we are affecting 'im. It teaches us to see many zhings in zhe expression. In zhis picture, zhere are zhree boys whose eyes betray zhem."

Remus looked at the picture and saw only his students from the previous year. He looked back at Fleur for an explanation.

"See zhis boy 'ere? What is 'is name?"

"Seamus Finnigan."

"Watch 'ow 'e laughs, but 'is eyes do not. When people laugh, zheir eyes get wider, or smaller. 'Is stay zhe same. I zhink 'e 'as seen violence, and expects to see more. 'E doesn't come from a nice place, no?"

"His home was Belfast. He's seen a lot of violence in his life."

"Zhen, zhere is Neville and 'Arry. Zhey are uncomfortable around other people, like zhey don't know who zhey are. Zhat's clear in zhe body language. But something 'as 'appened to zhem too, and zhat something controls zhem. Watch 'ow zhere eyes. . . 'ow do you say it, flit? Yes, flit back and forth like zhey are waiting for an old 'orror to return, something zhat zhey can't stop, like fate. Zhese eyes are old. 'Arry's are much older and 'ave grown even older since last night; but neither wizard, as young as zhey are, should 'ave eyes like zhis."



Remus stared at the picture. "It makes sense I guess. You know Harry's story, or at least the larger parts of it. But Neville, he lost his parents a couple days after Harry did."

"Zhey were killed too?"

"No. His parents were tortured with the Cruciatus curse for twelve hours. The Order shared many of the same wards, so the person who betrayed Harry's parents was able to tell the Death Eaters what wards they would come against. It was how Voldemort got passed the inner wards so quickly when he came after Harry, and it was how Neville's parents only woke up when they heard the Death Eaters in the house. They barely had enough time to hide Neville in the closet and put the proper charms on it. It probably saved Neville since they couldn't hear him cry. Unfortunately, no one else could either and he almost died from dehydration and malnourishment. In a last attempt to find him three days later, his grandmother went room by room and discovered the closet under an inventive Notice-Me-Not charm."

"Ow do you know zhis?"

"I was the one leading a group of Order members to find Neville. After seeing him last year, I wondered if permanent damage had been done by my failure to find him sooner, but from what I heard today, I guess not."

"What 'appened to 'is parents zhen?"

"They're living in St. Mungo's, tortured into madness."

Fleur shook her head. "It is so unfair. Unfair for 'Arry, for zhis Neville, for zhe families that lost zheir children last night."

"Unfair?" Sirius echoed as he walked back into the room from the kitchen. "There is no such thing as fairness, not a damn shred of it in this life; especially for Harry."

Fleur caught the look he shared with Remus, and read it as well.

"What is wrong with 'Arry!" she demanded.

"Nothing I can talk about," Sirius answered. "You'll have to ask him."

"C'est des conneries! – 'ow do you say in English. . . zhis is bullshit! First 'is family is killed. Zhen I find out 'is relatives are abusing 'im. Zhe family zhat adopted 'im died last night. Zhen zhere is zhe prophecy and now you are saying zhere is something else?"

"What prophecy?" Remus asked, though it came out very close to a growl.

"Zhe prophecy zhat was said when 'e was born. 'Arry must be zhe one to kill Voldemort. Neither can live while zhe other survives, it says. 'Arry was marked by Voldemort as 'is equal and now, 'e cannot escape it. What zhe 'ell else can 'appen to zhe boy?"

Silence.

Finally, the chair creaked as Remus got up to go to bed. "You'd be surprised," he whispered, suddenly too exhausted to stay awake.

Fleur pondered Remus's surprising last words while losing herself in the picture of the five young Gryffindor men. It was taken after a Quidditch win and Harry, despite what she pointed out to Remus, still looked happy.

After deciding she'd given Harry enough time to finish his shower, Fleur went upstairs to return the picture.

The light was on and the door ajar. Quietly, she pushed it open and looked in. Harry was standing with his back to her, stripped naked and drying himself off. Try as she might, Fleur couldn't turn away. She was entranced and enraged by the same red, blue, purple, and green lines on his shoulders and back that girl Cho was tracing this afternoon. They looked like interlocking spider webs, spreading out from every place Voldemort's curses had hit Harry's body.

As she watched, Harry took a sock from the trunk, muttered a simple cleaning charm, and laid it on his arm where the Death Eater sliced it open. With one end in his teeth, he managed to tie it, using it as a makeshift bandage, but Fleur noticed part of the sock was already turning red. Harry ignored it and put on a pair of boxers.

"'Arry?" she called quietly when he had them on. She caught the immediate flood of pheromones in the air again as Harry answered.

"Wait a second, I'm not dressed."

"Too late. I'm already in 'ere. You left zhis downstairs, I thought I'd bring it up to you." She handed over the picture.

"Oh, thanks," he said, taking it from her and putting it on the table.

Fleur stepped towards him and ran her hand lightly across his back. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?" he asked as he turned around to face her.

"About zhis," she said, tracing the marks on his chest now. "Zhese are broken blood vessels. It took a lot of force to do zhat." She paused. "Lie down, 'Arry."

"Why?" he gulped, not really getting the single-word question out.

Fleur smirked as she heard the question for what he was really asking. "Because I'm going to 'eal you, you silly boy."

Harry laid down on his stomach. When he was situated, she gently touched the center of a mass of multi-colored lines with her wand. Harry jerked, his body almost clearing the mattress.

"'E really 'urt you, didn't 'e?"

"It hurts a little," Harry said, not really answering her question. "I think I was more surprised by the wand touching me."

Fleur let out an exasperated sigh, realizing Cedric was right. Harry really did minimize everything.

She began again, this time placing her hand gently on his back, then resting her wand on the back of her hand and lifting up on the backend. As the tip lightly touched his skin, she whispered a charm and watched as his hands flexed once in response to the pain. The purple mark turned green, then yellow, then disappeared completely.

She removed her wand and pressed lightly on the spot. "Does it 'urt now, 'Arry?"

"No, how did you do that?"

Once again proving she was a quick learner, Fleur ignored the question and flicked the center of the newly healed spot with her finger.

"Ouch!" Harry yelled, and definitely cleared the mattress this time.

"I knew you were lying, 'Arry Potter!" Fleur spat out in a rush of emotion, her accent thickening. "Zhe next time I ask eef eet 'urts, and eet does, I expect you to zay, OUI!"

"Oui?" Harry asked, reaching up to massage the spot on his shoulder.

"Oui!" She responded, forcefully.

"Why 'we'? Why not 'us', or 'my', or even 'I'? I'd think 'yes' would work even better."

Fleur tried to hold on to her scowl. "Now 'e's trying to be cute?" she mumbled.

"Eef you zhink I'm cute," said Harry, playfully mocking her accent (and surprising himself), "Gabrielle weel be very jhealous."

"You are impossible!" she huffed, turned red, then lost the battle to keep the scowl. They both laughed.

Ten minutes later, Harry's back was feeling much better. An amused Fleur wondered if it was the spells, or having her hands all over his shoulders, back, and down his side to the top of his hip bones that had helped the most.

"I zhink I'm finished with your back. Now turn over."

"No."

"What? Why not?" she asked, genuinely surprised.

"I don't think that's a very good idea right now."

Fleur scrunched her eyebrows together, trying to figure out what was wrong. But once she caught the strong scent of pheromones again, she realized Harry was probably having that problem, and was trying to save her from noticing.

"Zhat's okay 'Arry. We'll take care of those bruises tomorrow," she suggested, inwardly touched at his consideration. She'd known too many wizards that would have tried to take advantage of the situation.

"Goodnight, 'Arry."

"Goodnight," he mumbled back.

She was almost through the door when she heard him again.

"Fleur?"

"Oui?" she answered. They smiled, but Harry's smile faltered rather quickly.

"Thank you."

Fleur heard the words, but saw much more. The broken spirit and deadness had returned. She'd hoped that finding Sirius alive would have changed it, but it was a vain hope.

She walked back to him and sat on the bed. "Non, 'Arry, it is you I need to zhank, and ask for forgiveness. Zhis year I 'ave treated you like zhe leetle boy I thought you were. But instead, I find in zhe second task, zhen again last night, zhat you are a 'ero trapped in a young man's body."

Harry tried to speak, but Fleur put her finger on his lips. "Non, please listen. Your 'eadmaster told me zhat I was zhe third life you 'ad saved – why are you laughing?"

"No reason, please go on," said Harry, trying to stop.

"Non! I want to know."

"It's nothing, I promise."

"Arry, if you don't tell me, zhen zhe next time we are in public, I will throw my Veela magic at you and make you embarrass yourself."

"Resorting to threats now?"

"If zhat is what it takes, yes," she answered with her own self-assured smile.

"Don't you mean 'Oui'?"

"Arry!"

"Alright, alright." He grinned at her response. There was just something about the way she said his name.

"It's just that, well, I guess he miscounted."

"Miscounted?"

"Never mind. It's late and if Mrs. Weasley finds you sitting on my bed, we're both in trouble."

"Don't change zhe subject," she demanded in mock anger. "Who mis. . . No! You mean you've saved more zhen three people?"

"When we were Firsties, Ron and I saved Hermione from a mountain troll that had been set loose in Hogwarts, though somehow I managed to get my wand stuck up its nose. It was not fun cleaning it that night."

"A mountain troll?"

"Yeah," Harry laughed at the memory now. "Scared the goblins out of us, too. But we did it. When the Professors caught up, Hermione lied to get Ron and I out of trouble for sneaking off. That was the day the three of us became best mates. Except for spats here and there, we've been inseparable pretty much ever since."

"Arry, after everything else, I 'ave learned to believe you. But do you know 'ow incredible zhat sounds?"

Harry turned to lie on his side so he could face her better. "It was the best thing that could have happened to us. I guess it prepared us for

the last few years, like the time Ron and I went down to find Ginny. . ." his voice trailed off. "Fleur?"

"Oui?"

"Are you using your Veela magic on me?"

Fleur raised an eyebrow. "Non, why do you ask?"

"This is the first time I have ever told this type of stuff to anyone other than Ron, Hermione, or Dumbledore, so why am I telling you?"

"I don't know 'Arry. But I am 'appy you trust me enough to tell me."

She stood up to leave again. "I should be going to bed."

"Thanks again," Harry said. He pulled the sheet and blanket up to his neck. But Fleur could still see him pull his knees up to his chest, his elbows tucked in. The dichotomy again baffled her. After showing so much strength and power, here he lay in bed like a helpless child, afraid to be left alone in a room . . .

. . . left alone in this room. His best friend's room. The same one who died last night. "'Arry, do you want me to sleep in zhe other bed?"

"No, it's okay. You'll probably be more comfortable in Ginny's bed."

"You are zhe most stubborn wizard! Don't lie to me."

Harry seemed to sink deeper into the bed and looked completely vulnerable. "I've never been in this room alone at night. Everywhere I look, I see Ron. I keep expecting him or Hermione or Ginny or one of the twins to walk through the door. Every time they don't, it's like they die all over again."

It took her all of a second to make her decision. A few minutes later, Fleur walked back up the stairs to the bedroom, wearing an old t-shirt that she hadn't worn since last summer and knickers. As she entered the room, Harry caught his breath and groaned quietly before turning over to face the wall. But as he did, he grunted in pain.

"Are you alright?" she asked, grinning.

"Yep," he answered quickly.

"Don't lie to me, 'Arry. Should I come over and 'eal your chest now?" Fleur bit down on her lip to stop herself from laughing. She knew she was being a little cruel to Harry, especially after the dreams he probably had last night. But in truth, she was enjoying herself. There was something about his innocence, his ability to make her feel safe with her sexuality as a part Veela that drew her to him. Yet, it wasn't a sexual draw per se, more like she could, well, be myself. The last time that happened, I was Gabrielle's age.

"No," he responded, drawing her back to the moment. "You should definitely stay over there."

Fleur bit down on her lip even harder to stop from laughing, and thought about telling him what she was planning on wearing to bed. Then she realized that'd be completely cruel. Instead, she crawled into bed and waved her wand, turning off the light.

"Goodnight, 'Arry."

"Goodnight, Fleur."

"'Arry?"

"Yeah?"

"If Molly wakes us up tomorrow morning and we're lying like we were zhis morning, I'm blaming you."

Fleur was rewarded with a blush that radiated in the moonlight flooding the room. With that, she rolled over to fall asleep, a smile plastered on her face.

X O X O X O X

Two hours later, sleep still hadn't come. The bed was comfortable enough, as was the pillow. But Fleur's mind would not stop racing.

What was she doing? Why was she flirting with a fourteen year old? Was she flirting with him?



Yeah, I am, she finally admitted to herself. But why?

The second task. It really did start there.

Fleur was standing on the shore, wrapped in blankets and being consoled by Madame Maxime, who was telling her that Gabrielle would be okay. But an irrational fear had taken over and Fleur knew she'd never see her sister again. She doted on Gabrielle. More than once, Fleur had skipped out on friends to come home and spend time with her sister, and the feeling was mutual. According to Gabrielle, Fleur wasn't just a big sister, she was everything Gabrielle wanted to be. How lucky was it that your hero, was your very own big sister?

But Fleur knew that heroines don't fail like she did that day at the lake, and failing, made her a failure at being a heroine for her sister. If there is a god in heaven, please bring back Gabrielle – she remembered saying to herself. Almost in answer to her prayer, three heads popped up out of the water. By the time they had reached the shore, Fleur was flailing, trying to get away from Madame Maxime and get down to Gabrielle. A few seconds later she'd broken away and ran to her sister.

Fleur felt like such a fraud, holding her sister and hoping that she'd understand that Fleur had done everything she could. But regardless, she felt so grateful to have Gabrielle in her arms again. Then her eyes fell on the little boy that saved her, that bested the heroine.

Lying in bed, Fleur wiped away tears as the memory finished. No one else knew that she woke up every night the following week, crying because she had dreamed that Gabrielle was dead. Those dreams gradually changed to reflect what had actually happened, then went even further until one night, Gabrielle made it, but Harry didn't.

Fleur remembered the utter panic she felt when she woke up that night. A little boy died doing what the heroine couldn't. But what little boy would sacrifice himself? Why would Harry wait to save Gabrielle, and sacrifice his place in the standings or worse yet, his life?

Those were the questions, and the night, that everything began to change as Fleur asked herself what she would've done. That was

also the night she realized introspection could be more painful than a dozen Cruciatus curses.

The next day, she remembered seeing Harry in the dining room and smiling at him. He smiled back, a plain, simple smile. It was the first time she realized that his smiles weren't filled with want or lust and she felt – comfortable? Was the right term?

She spoke with Harry quite a bit after that day, often telling him what Gabrielle had said about him. She found that she enjoyed watching the young wizard blush. It was so. . .cute and innocent, and it made her feel even more comfortable.

Looking back on it now, she realized how thin her excuses to talk to him had become. A mere passing mention in a letter from a friend would be relayed to Harry at breakfast the next morning. But through all of that, she still doubted his story about putting his name in the Goblet of Fire. At least, until last night.

Fleur folded her pillow in half, propping her head up a bit higher so she could look across the room and watch Harry sleep. The memories of the last twenty-four hours now flooding back: Harry coming through the hedges to save her out of the curse in the maze, being shocked and flung to the ground by it; Harry, standing at the end of the pathway after she hurt him again with her words; Harry, suggesting they all take the cup and share the victory, not wanting to take it himself. Harry, landing on top of the hill and telling Cedric to come get the two of them and leave. Harry being bound and cast across the graveyard, but refusing their help because he wanted them to survive. Lying at the bottom of the hill, hearing him being hit with curses, watching him save her life with what the English call an Unforgivable; facing off with the most powerful wizard she'd ever seen, and winning.

Fleur skipped the scene at Hogwarts, knowing if she dwelt on what she saw in Harry there, she'd be in Harry's bed in under a minute, holding him close to her. But she couldn't forget the way he came to save her again, dueling and casting a snake, trying to protect her and telling her to leave so he could face them alone.

Then the cave. That was no fourteen year old boy that sat on the floor of the cave and stared into the fire. It was a wraith of a human tortured again by forces of Darkness and Wickedness. Then this

morning, again the innocence as he woke up, and even more so when he was comforting her. She had never been held that way, had never cried on someone's shoulder. A large reason was her Veela heritage. It was in a Veela to be strong, matriarchal, even dominant if possible. But to be held by a male and cry while feeling safe; knowing that every touch, every whisper was out of concern without secondary motive? Why again, did he have to be fourteen years old? Or she, seventeen, almost eighteen?

On top of all that, there was the prophecy. He would have to face Voldemort again, not only face him, but kill him or be killed. This sweet, kind young wizard, this hero, this wraith and veteran of battles against the Darkness, would have to face death again. How could he really be only fourteen? Gabrielle was two years younger than him and at that age, he had already faced Voldemort twice, three times if the encounter years ago was included – four times including last night. Zut, and now she had sworn to a dying man that she'd care for him. Was that it? All these changes, everything she went through, was it fated so that she could care for Harry, protect him from himself as he protected everyone else? Was she to be his protector or big sister?

But what if she didn't want to be a protector, or a big sister? What if she wanted something else? With a fourteen year old boy? Or is he the wraith-hero with old eyes and a lifetime's worth of pain and responsibility. . .at fourteen?

"Fortuna Virgo, vous êtes une pute." She whispered to the heavens.

Whatever happens, she promised herself, I won't get in his way, and I won't cause him any more pain than he's already endured. Years later, she'd look back and shake her head at the utter futility of that promise.

X O X O X O X

"Come now Lucius. Do you really expect me to believe that you gave the diary to the youngest Weasley in hopes of Harry Potter being killed in retaliation for the Philosopher's stone incident?"

Malfoy was prostrate before him on the floor. "My Lord I—"

"Crucio!"

"You do not know what it contained, or did you fancy yourself as powerful a wizard as me?"

"No, my Lord."

"You have cost me much! CRUCIO!"

Voldemort began wondering about his other horcruxes – the locket in the cave, Regulus Black's house elf couldn't get passed my defenses there; the ring; the cup. . .

"Crucio!" Lucius Malfoy jerked and bounced across the floor.

"Now, my wayward Death Eater. You have failed me greatly. Though you did well cleansing the school. It is a pity so much Pure-blood had to be spilled, but most of them were already tainted with Albus's teachings. So what punishment is befitting you? Ahh, how lowly would it be, for a father to take orders from a son. Bring the boy in here!"

Draco walked in, white faced and shaking.

Voldemort motioned him closer. "Do you choose to take the Dark Mark, young Malfoy, and redeem your father's honor?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"Then bear your arm."

Malfoy screamed in pain for the next twenty minutes as the mark burned in.

X O X O X O X

Harry woke up, yelling and holding his scar as it bled. He could feel the Voldemort's wrath and hatred, sense the darkness within his very soul.

The light turned on and two very soft, but very blurry hands were on his face, wiping away the blood from his forehead.

'Arry, 'Arry, what's wrong!" Fleur was asking, her voice frightened.

"It's just a dream. I'll be fine."

"Zhen why are you 'olding your 'ead?"

"I get headaches when I dream."

"And you bleed too? You are lying again, 'Arry!"

Fleur took her wand and waved it over him, cleaning the blood that seeped out of the scar. "You are not going to dream like zhat again tonight," she promised him.

Before 'Arry knew what she meant, Fleur pulled the covers back and climbed into the bed with him. She spooned him again, reaching around and pulling him tightly into her body, letting her Veela magic out. She held him all night, chasing away his demons, or in this case, the demon called Voldemort.

A/N Okay, I was wrong, now we have two more chapters before their in France. Just a couple of thoughts. First, from a review, I thought it would be important to note that just because we don't see them mourning all the time, doesn't mean they don't. In my experience (and I've worked with a number of families that are dealing with death, though that doesn't make me an expert by any means), the way I painted this chapter is how I've seen families deal with death, and Sirius's advice is the advice I normally give.

If the last part is rough, I'm sorry. I am pressed for time and wanted to get this posted today. The next chapter may take two weeks, but it's coming!

I also hope that this chapter answers questions about the speed concerning Fleur's feelings for Harry. It's something that's been developing for a long time.

Please Review, I am really enjoying reading your thoughts!

E.C.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A BURROW FULL OF TRUTH

The sun was shining through the bedroom window, brightening the room and gradually bringing Harry out of a deep slumber. A warm breeze blew across his chest and a light, intoxicating scent permeated the air. Harry refused to open his eyes, hoping to fall back asleep and enjoy what little heaven this world was currently offering.

The breeze blew again. Gradually waking up, he felt pressure against his chest, but it lessened as the warm breeze wafted over him once more. Other parts of his body began reporting sensations, each one a variation of 'soft and delicate'. The pressure on his chest increased and decreased in synchronous dance-step with the warmth breeze.

What perfected the moment, was a soft cross between a purr and a sigh.

Fleur snuggled closer to Harry, one arm under his head and the other folded between them, her hand on his chest pressing into him in rhythm with her breathing, her legs touching his – her bare legs, bare up to her knickers. . . .

Harry, now definitely awake, quickly banished the thought even as Fleur's breath blew across his chest again. But the dreams he'd had the last two nights, coupled with the current sensations of flesh and breath held his mind hostage.

As Harry lay transfixed, Fleur was being pulled out of her own slumber by the feel of Harry's warm body. She'd never felt so comfortable in a wizard's arms.

She decided to remain silent, thinking instead about what could be. All she had to do was open her eyes, stretch a little and kiss him. A single, deep passionate kiss was all that was needed to tell him what she was felt for him deep in her soul. The questions and concerns could wait for later – but what if later didn't come? Is that even more reason to act now? What if later did come and she found that she didn't like him like she thought she did?

For all of Fleur's beauty and innate sensuality, she had never had a boyfriend before. There had been dates and a good bit of kissing, even more than that a few times though she was still a virgin (which made her cousins laugh when they found out), but for all of that, she was almost as inexperienced as Harry when it came to relationships, and that made her unsure of herself when it came to real feelings. It wasn't really her fault. Most wizards only showered her with lust. Since that wasn't a deep emotion, she never had have to respond with her own emotions, or understand them.

But Harry? It was just one more thing that took her by surprise. He kept her guessing, and she found herself drawn to that as well, but what if that died out and how important is that and what about his age and what if that doesn't matter and why am I so confused and what if this was all part of a Veela's way of falling in love and Mon Dieux did I just think the word love? I really need to talk to Maman, she'll understand. At least I can wait until I get to France and not spend every waking moment around Harry before I make a choice.

But the way I feel here, lying in his arms, is. . . right. Fleur sighed and snuggled even closer, deciding to enjoy the stillness of the morning and ignore all the questions racing around in her head.

X O X O X O X

Molly descended the stairs looking rather confused. "Have either of you seen Fleur?"

"No. Harry neither, why?" asked Remus, looking over the top of his book.

"I just went to wake her up and she's not in her bed. Did she say anything to either of you last night about going anywhere?"

"No. We talked about Harry and Neville," Remus remembered, "though she seemed upset about everything that's happened to Harry."

"I'd say," Sirius agreed. "The way she worried about him last night. . ." his voice trailed off and after a moment of contemplation, a grin grew from ear to ear. Molly quickly turned to make her way up five flights of stairs as fast as possible. Sirius came up right behind

her, refusing to miss an opportunity to take the mickey out of his godson. Remus followed in the hopes of keeping everyone alive.

X O X O X O X

Fleur and Harry were still lying in bed, pretending to be asleep when the door flew open. "HARRY JAMES POTTER WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" Molly exploded.

"Mrs. Weasley!" Harry spun around so fast he got tangled in the bed sheets and almost fell right out of the bed.

"Don't 'Mrs. Weasley' me!" she thundered back at him. "I want to know what you are doing in bed with a witch in my house!"

"I . . . I don't know."

"Isn't that a shame!" Sirius chimed, stepping into the room.

"Don't encourage him," Molly snapped.

"I don't think he needs any encouragement at this point."

Molly cast a withering glare at Sirius.

"What? I just made sure he knew how to properly ward his wand yesterday. That's not encouraging him, it's being a good godfather!"

"OUT!" she shouted at the same time Remus grabbed him by the back of the shirt and forced him from the room.

Molly turned back to the couple in bed.

"Fleur."

"Oui, Molly?"

"Would you mind explaining to me why you are in bed with a fourteen year old wizard?"

"Molly," Remus interjected, "maybe we should wait until—"



"I AM NOT WAITING!" she exploded again. "I want to know why Frenchie thinks she can take Harry away from me!"

"Frenchie?" Fleur spat out, ready to showcase all the interesting English words she learned at Hogwarts during the year.

Remus cut in. "Molly, no one is taking anyone away from you!"

"MY WIZARDING ARSE THEY'RE NOT!" Molly screamed as she spun around to face Remus. "Don't you DARE tell me that. They took my whole family away from me! My brothers, my husband, my sons, my daughter" –tears streaked down her cheeks – "and now she's taking Harry away! He's my last child and I can't lose him. I can't lose hi-m." Her tirade ended in sobs.

Sirius stepped into the room again and put his arms around her, easing her back down the stairs to the kitchen.

Remus waited until they were out of earshot before speaking to Harry and Fleur.

"I think you gave Molly a bit of a surprise."

"Zhis isn't what it looks like," Fleur immediately began to protest.

Remus laughed. "Do you know how many times I heard Sirius say the same thing when I was a Prefect? Don't worry, in this case, I don't need to know."

"Non, you do. 'Arry 'ad a very bad dream last night. 'E was yelling and clutching at 'is scare in pain. I was in zhe other bed, but when I 'eard 'Arry, I climbed in bed with 'im so I could give 'im better dreams. What else could I do? 'E was in so much pain and I 'ave never seen a scar bleed before."

At the word "bleed," Remus crossed the room in three steps, taking Harry's head in his hands and inspecting the scar.

"It was a very nice thing you did for him," he said a few moments later, "though I think 'better dreams' was probably an understatement, depending on how strong your magic is."

Fleur blushed, then blushed again when Harry looked at her.

"Is that why I've been dreaming about. . ." he stopped, turned red himself, and refused to finish the sentence.

"Yes, 'Arry. Zhat is why you 'ad dreams about me zhe last two nights. I used my magic to 'elp you 'ave good dreams, instead of dreaming about what you went through, or whatever it was last night."

Finished with his impromptu checkup, Remus let go of Harry's head. "How are you feeling?"

"Fine, thanks to Fleur, I guess."

Remus chuckled. "What were you dreaming about before Fleur decided to help you?"

"It's not important."

"I think your former DADA professor should be the one to determine if a bleeding Curse Scar and dreams that wake you up screaming in the middle of the night are or are not important, don't you agree Fleur?"

"Oui. 'E's right."

Harry leaned against the headboard, communicating his dislike at the turn of the conversation.

"Harry, we need all the information we can get. If the curse-scar that Voldemort gave you is hurting at the same time that you're dreaming, there are a number of things it may mean, especially with the other things you've told us."

"What other zhings? What are you 'olding back from me 'Arry?" Fleur demanded to know, remembering her conversation with Remus and Sirius the previous night.

Harry tried to ignore her, but Fleur continued to glare at him until he couldn't stand it anymore.

"Fine!" he said somewhat petulantly, breaking eye-contact with Fleur and turning back to Remus. "I was wrong. Voldemort made five

Horcruxes, not including the diary we already know about." He purposefully left himself out.

"Orcruxes? 'E made 'Orcruxes?"

"You know of Horcruxes?" Remus couldn't hide his surprise.

"Of course. Zhey're tied in with Rusalka myths in Slavic culture. A Rusalka was a beautiful young woman who was murdered and took zhe form of a nymph, succubus, or ghost. She couldn't die until 'er murder was avenged. In zhe myths, zhe murderer is said to create 'orcruxes so 'e – always a 'e – can't be killed, which explains why Rusalka are always around. Zhe Polish expand on zhe myth, calling zhe Rusalka 'Wila'. Wila are supposed to be strong fighters and able to lure men to do whatever zhey want. Zthese are zhe myths of our origins, told to Veela children. I didn't know 'Orcruxes were real."

"They are. Are there any myths about the Horcruxes themselves?" Remus pressed.

"No," she answered. "'Ow do you know 'e made a 'Orcrux?"

"Because I already destroyed one in my second year," Harry answered with a smirk.

Fleur's head snapped around so fast her blond hair hit both Harry and Remus in the face. "You did what?"

"You heard right. He's already destroyed a Horcrux, but enough about this," Remus added. "Get dressed and come downstairs for breakfast so we can explain everything to Molly."

He left the room and Harry slid down into the bed, rubbing his eyes. "When you said you were going to blame me if Mrs. Weasley found us sleeping together like yesterday, I didn't think you were going to set me up."

Fleur slapped him playfully on the chest.

"Oh, zut! I forgot. I'm sorry," she breathed as Harry winced. "Let's get zhe rest of you 'ealed."

It took longer this time as there were many more marks on his chest and arms. Sirius even came back to check on them, but after sticking his head in the room, he went down stairs without a word.

"I zhink zhat is zhe last one," Fleur announced twenty-five minutes later.

"Thanks, I um, . . . with everything happening the last couple of days, I've. . . um—you've been. . . ." Harry stopped and stared at his hands.

Fleur decided to help him out. "Is it about zhe dreams?"

"No!"

She was successful (though barely) in restraining her laughter at his reaction. "If it is, 'Arry, it's okay. You don't have to be embarrassed, I'm zhe one that caused you to dream about me."

"That's not that big of a deal—"

Fleur pursed her lips and widened her eyes slightly, again flirting with Harry against her own will, or with it, she didn't even know anymore. Either way, she got the desired response.

"I don't mean you're not a big deal bodily—"

Fleur raised an eyebrow.

"Not bodily, I didn't mean it physically!"

Unmercifully, Fleur pulled out her 'hurt little girl' look to torture/flirt with Harry some more. "You don't zhink being close to me physically is a big deal?"

"No—"

She gave him another look.

"I meant yes, it's great being with you physically!"

Now both platinum blonde eyebrows were raised.

"NO! Not like that! It was only a dream, how would I know what—"

Fleur went for the kill-shot. "Was I good in your dream, 'Arry?"

He spluttered and went silent, flushing red before getting out of bed to leave the room in embarrassment, only to find that Fleur's healing hands and the current conversation had put him in the same state he was in the previous night.

Harry quickly jumped back into bed, laid on his stomach and pulled the covers up over his head.

Mirth danced across Fleur's beautiful features and she decided that she'd tortured Harry enough.

"It's okay. I know you would 'ave found it wonderful in your dream. A Veela's magic guarantees zhat you dream about me. Zhe amount of magic I push determines 'ow sexual your dream is. 'Owever, your own imagination supplies zhe rest. I pushed a good amount of magic because I didn't want you to suffer. I wanted you to zhink about me rather zhen zhe nightmares and I wanted to make sure zhey would not come back."

"Oh trust me, they didn't," Harry mumbled from under the covers, to Fleur's humor.

She reached over and pulled the covers back so she could see him. "Zhat's good, 'Arry, please don't be embarrassed about zhem. Zhey were my choice. I was only teasing a moment ago."

"Why?"

"Why was I teasing you?"

"No, why did you do that for me? Why are you staying around?"

For a brief moment, Fleur thought about throwing all caution to the wind and baring her heart to Harry, but that path wasn't one yet to be decided upon. She picked another, but just as valid reason. "Because I made a promise to your 'eadmaster zhat I would stay with you."

"You don't have to do that. I've been on my own many times before."

"Non, 'Arry, I will – and do you know why?"

"You really don't—"

"Answer me, 'Arry. Do you know why?"

"No," he finally confessed.

Fleur sat straight up and opened her eyes wide, bouncing on the bed in a rather humorous imitation of Dobby. "Because, 'Arry Potter sir is great wizard, yes he is! Fleur Delacour stay with 'Arry Potter sir. Bad wizards don't know about Veela anger, but teach 'em Fleur Delacour will! Teach bad wizard real good Sir."

Her attempt at levity somewhat succeeded and Harry cracked a smile.

Then, looking at her again, he began laughing.

"You're not laughing at my impersonation of Dobby, are you?" she asked, somehow already knowing his response.

"No," he answered, truthfully.

"Zhen what is 'Arry Potter laughing at Sir?"

He laughed even harder. "I just had a vision of you with Dobby's eyes and ears."

Fleur playfully swatted him again.

"Hey! Dobby doesn't do that."

"Non? Zhen what does 'e do?"

"He usually brings me presents and gives me food."

"You really care for 'im, don't you?" Fleur asked, noticing how his body language softened while talking about Dobby. What she didn't notice however, was how that small observation fell into place for her, or what it meant when it did.

"Yeah. I do. He risked much for me."

"Hmm," Fleur pondered. It would take her a couple years to realize why Harry's friendship with Dobby caused her to ask the next question.

"Does he do zhis?"

Fleur leaned in, lightly touching her lips to his. It wasn't the kiss she thought about before, the deeply intense kiss meant to confess her heart to him. This kiss was innocent, pure, even chaste as she slipped her hand behind his head and held him there for a second, before pulling away.

But it was far more than a kiss, because in the back of her mind - even though she refused to admit it - she knew exactly what she'd done. Harry didn't know and perhaps never would. But if they made it back to France. . . .

Fleur noticed the look on Harry's face and surprised herself by giggling. He looked Obliviated.

"I zhink I should go downstairs and straighten out zhe problem with Molly. You're probably still tired. Why don't you go back to sleep for a little while."

Harry nodded, but was unable to string together a coherent sentence. Fleur watched to make sure he hadn't slipped under her Veela magic, but he didn't show any of the normal signs. His inability to speak was simply a result of being kissed by Fleur, not "Veela Fleur". She grinned at him and pulled the covers up, leaving the room both happy, and even more confused.

So much for waiting until we get to France. Damn, damn, damn.

Fleur returned a few minutes later to find him asleep. Lightly touching him, she pushed more magic out, hoping the apotropaic touch was enough to keep his demons away.

X O X O X O X

"Where's Harry?" Molly asked as Fleur descended the stairs.

"Still in bed. 'E needed more sleep after last night."

Molly spun around so fast the food she was preparing flew out of the bowl she was holding.

"Non! Non! Zhat's not what I meant! Stupeed English language!"

Fleur ignored the guffaws coming from the table and focused on the matronly witch in front of her. "I meant zhat 'e 'ad bad dreams and 'ad a 'ard time sleeping. I wanted to come down 'ere and speak with you alone since 'E doesn't need to see anyone upset at 'im."

Molly put the bowl down and picked up a towel, wiping her hands off. "You're right. That wasn't one of my better moments. I've been trying to not cry in front of him since he's lost so much already. But this morning. . . . I have to keep reminding myself that I am not his mother – It's difficult in the best of times. He's been through so much." The stern 'mother's lecture look' known the world over manifested. "But that doesn't change the fact that you are under my roof and while you're here, there are certain rules I expect you to live by."

Fleur opened her mouth to speak but was cut off by Molly, only to be cut off herself by Remus. "I think you should let Fleur explain before you say anything else. It'll save both of you a lot of embarrassment."

Molly turned back to Fleur. "Okay, then please explain how you ended up in bed with an underage wizard."

A little while later, Fleur concluded. ". . . And zhat's all zhat 'appened, I promise. Can you blame me for not wanting 'Arry to sleep in zhat room alone, or for taking away 'is bad dreams?"

"I guess not," Molly conceded. "That's what I get for jumping to conclusions."

"Jumping to conclusions? You thought we. . . is zhat what you zhink of me? Or 'Arry?"

"Of course not. It's just that I have a fairly good idea how a witch can affect a wizard's – desires, shall we say? Add to that the fact that you're a few years older and unnaturally beautiful. . . ." she let the sentence drop.



"Do you zhink I 'ave 'Arry under Veela control like zome kind of puppet on zhe ztring?" Fleur's anger manifested in a deeper accent. "Is zhat what you zhink of me? Zhat I'm a Veela pute – 'ow do you zay een English –a Veela whore, maybe zelling my body for 'Arry's protection zhe last few days?"

Molly stepped back and raised her hands. "No, no. I don't think you're purposefully doing anything to him."

"PURPOSEFULLY?" Fleur shrieked. "Zo you zhink I can't control my magic and am luring 'Arry accidentally?"

"Oh, dear, I'm making a mess out of this." Molly sighed. "Oh hex it all, I might as well be stunner-curse blunt about it seeing as how this conversation has gone all pear-shaped anyway."

She took a deep breath before beginning. "Harry's fourteen years old. Most boys that age are a walking set of hormones and would shag a dragon if given the chance, let alone a beautiful witch with a foreign accent. Throw in what most teenage boys believe about Veela sexuality and I'm sure he's been dreaming about riding you like a dragon the last two nights, even more-so if I understand how you affected his dreams.

"Now, add on top of that everything the two of you have endured together the last two days, the emotional turmoil, the loss both of you must be going through, and the inevitable closeness between the two of you due to what you've experienced together, and you have the exact type of situation that sends a wizard's dragon looking for a witch's treasure cave."

Molly glanced over at the two grown wizards sitting slack-jawed at the table. "Oh please, I raised six boys."

Half an hour later, breakfast was served and Fleur had finally recovered, though she still blushed every few minutes.

Sirius, showing a rare use of restraint, wisely left it alone. Instead, he was focused on Remus's recounting of what he learned upstairs about the Horcruxes.

"Five more?" Sirius clarified. How can any man break his soul into eight different parts?"

Fleur shook her head. "Non, zhat would be seven parts. Zhe diary, zhe five others 'e told us about zhis morning, and zhe part Voldemort still 'as."

"No, I meant eight," Sirius confirmed, refusing to look at Fleur. "I think collecting them should be the first task of the Order. If we can destroy them, then the next time Voldemort is killed, he'll be gone for good."

"Eight?" Fleur breathed.

"You mean the next time Harry kills him, according to the prophecy," Remus corrected.

"What prophecy?" Molly's voice boomed.

"Ow can zhere be eight unless" – Fleur, still caught up counting Horcruxes, thought back to the abbreviated conversation with Sirius and Remus the previous night and gasped - "'Arry is a 'Orcrux, isn't 'e?" She demanded to know.

"HARRY'S A HORCRUX? WHAT IS THIS PROPHECY? - SOMEONE HAD BETTER START TALKING REAL FAST!" Molly screeched.

Sirius's fork clanked against his plate where he dropped it and leaned back in his chair. "I think it's time for the four of us to have a little talk about Harry."

X O X O X O X

Two decisions came out of the discussion. The first was that Sirius was going to Gringotts to pick up his family Pensieve. It had been stored in the Black vault as an heirloom since he was a child. With it, Harry could put his thoughts (and dreams as he thought about them) in it and they could try to identify where the other Horcruxes were.

The second decision concerned Harry directly. Sirius, Remus, and Molly were going to sit down and talk to him about the prophecy, the

Horcruxes, and what he was doing with three books on the Dark Arts.

Speaking of whom, Sirius thought to himself, It's time to wake him up.

Half a minute later, he was upstairs. "Hey, Harry, dragon-dream time is over."

Sirius laughed at his own joke as Harry pulled the pillow over his head.

"You're father didn't like getting up either. But Lily found an ingenious way to get him out of bed. What do you know about the Augamenti charm?"

"You wouldn't," Harry mumbled under his pillow.

"Ohh! That sounds like a challenge." He was amused by the speed which Harry moved to get out of bed.

Sirius sat down on the other bed as Harry dressed. "How did you heal so fast?" he asked as Harry looked for a shirt. Of course, Sirius had seen exactly how Fleur had healed him, but he hadn't had this much fun with someone since James.

"What are you talking about?"

Sirius opened the curtains to shed more light in the room. "Yesterday, you were covered in broken blood vessels and curse marks. Today, they're gone."

"Oh," was Harry's only response.

"Oh? What does 'Oh' mean?"

"It means, 'oh'," Harry answered, thinking quickly how to change the topic, but he wasn't quick enough.

"Hmm. Let's see now. I know you couldn't reach some of those marks on your back. Remus or Molly didn't heal you and I know I didn't." He crossed his arms and waited for Harry to confirm what he already knew.

"It was Dobby."

"Harry, has anyone told you that you're a horrible liar?"

"What do you mean?"

"Nice try. Fleur came downstairs and gave us an account of last night and she didn't mention Dobby at all. By the way, Veela myths mention their ability to heal others almost as much as their other charms. Now, if you had just told me it was Fleur, it wouldn't have been a big deal. But since you lied about it, it makes me a little curious as to her, um, method, shall we say?"

Harry rolled his eyes.

"Come on, Harry."

"Did my father ever tell you that you were a pain in the arse?"

Sirius smiled widely. "All the time. Makes me glad Azkaban hasn't changed me. Oh, and I happened to look in earlier. Healers don't usually put their hands all over you when they're performing their spells, nor do they do it in their knickers. I hope you enjoyed yourself."

Harry picked up his pillow and threw it across the room at Sirius, who caught it and threw it back at Harry even harder, knocking him back onto the bed.

Harry dropped his shirt and dove at his godfather, tackling him to the floor. Their laughter echoed through the top three levels of the Burrow as they wrestled. After the fourth time Sirius tied Harry up like a pretzel, he called an end to it and sat down on the bed.

"I have to go. I'm making a quick trip to Gringots."

"Why?"

"My father kept a Pensieve in the vault. It's supposed to be a Black family heirloom."

"What's the sense of having something like that if you don't have it somewhere that you can use it?"

Looking down his nose at Harry in a mockery of his parents snobbery, Sirius answered. "We are mere scum compared to the lofty and non-disowned Black family. How can we plunder the depths of their insanity – I mean intellect?"

Harry laughed with Sirius, but it was cut short by Harry announcing that he was going with him.

"No, Harry. It's too dangerous. You're a prime target."

But Harry was ready for that answer. "Exactly, so either I go with you to get money out of my vault now, or we get separated somehow and I end up going by myself or with Fleur. Do you think it's safe walking with a part Veela down the middle of Diagon Alley?"

"You're right. I'll take money out of my vault and you can use that."

Harry shook his head emphatically. "No way. I'm not taking your money, especially after you spent half of it on my Firebolt."

"Harry, the empty space from the gold used to buy the Firebolt didn't even register in the Black family vault. I have no one else to spend that money on besides myself."

"So spend it on Remus. Maybe he could buy something with it. I'm not taking your money."

"Stop being so stubborn James and take the money. You can pay me back when you get a chance."

"James?" Harry asked, a little surprised at the slip up.

Sirius shrugged. "We had plenty of these same arguments."

"Good. Then you're used to losing them. When are we leaving?"

Sirius muttered something about cursing Harry all the way back to Hogwarts before he answered. "I'll make you a deal. You get Molly to agree to let you go, and I won't say another word."

Harry started to protest, but stopped. "Okay."

After he finished his morning routine, Harry went downstairs with Sirius right behind him.

"Mrs. Weasley, I'm going to Muggle London today."

"What?"

"I need to go to Muggle London. I can take the underground and buses."

"There's no way you'll be safe in Muggle London. I don't think that's a wise choice."

"It's safer than Diagon Alley, isn't it?"

"Not really. At least in Diagon Alley, you could side-along Apparate with someone if something went wrong."

"But I really want to go to Muggle London!"

"As much as I act otherwise at times, I know I'm not your mother Harry, I can't tell you no. But I don't think it's a good idea and I would hope you'd be careful enough to listen to me."

"Okay. What if I just went to Diagon Alley with Sirius and picked up a couple things then?"

"I didn't think he was going to do any shopping. What if you're seen by a Death Eater?"

"Then Sirius can side-Apparate me home, just like you said."

She sighed. "Well, it's safer than Muggle London I guess."

Harry beamed at her, smirked at Sirius, and left the kitchen.

"You raised six boys and still fell for that?" Sirius asked after Harry went into the sitting room.

"No. I don't like it, but I know Harry well enough to know that he's going to find some way to get whatever he thinks he needs. He's as

headstrong as any of my boys or Ginny. I swear he's another one of my kids. They were all the same. At least this way, he'll be with you."

Sirius gave her a knowing nod. "We might as well have our conversation with him before we go then. It'll give him and me time to discuss things later if he wants."

"I think that's a good idea." A maternal worry creased her face. "Please make sure he's safe, Sirius."

"I'll do my best. I think I'm going to take Remus with me too, just to make sure."

X O X O X O X

Fleur was sitting in Ginny's room while the other spoke with Harry. Once it was finished, Harry came upstairs to say goodbye to Fleur.

"Do you need anything?" He asked.

"Non, Dobby brought everything of mine 'ere last night. I 'ave everything I need. Zhank you though."

"There's a great chocolate shop there that was supposed to have opened over Christmas. I could get something for you."

"I know zhat shop. Zhey 'ave one in France and I was zhere last summer when zhey were talking about opening zhe shop 'ere. Zhe chocolate is great, but very expensive 'Arry. You don't need to buy me anything."

But she read the look he gave her, like he was holding back a coy smile, and knew he would buy her something anyway. It was, sweet. There really wasn't another word for it. Fleur almost gave in and told him her favorite type of chocolate, but stopped herself, both interested in what he thought she'd like, and also determined not to be the type of Veela that made wizards shower them with money and gifts.

As soon as Harry left, Fleur went to the window and sat on the bench, watching the three wizards walk out to the Apparation point. Why was the decision to jump into Harry's bed so easy and why did she kiss him? What did it mean, or did it mean anything?

She was so completely confused. Even her decision to wait until she got to France, a smart decision she thought, was too little too late. Maybe it was all because she was so tired. Pushing her magic out to affect Harry as they both slept the last two nights was wearing down her magic. She was a lot more tired than she let on.

But that wasn't the answer either. Something else was happening. She couldn't put words to it, but it felt like she was almost going through a second transformation. The first one, when her Veela nature took over at the age of thirteen was bad enough, but this transformation felt more painful and it wasn't even biological or magical. She was changing on the inside, but what was she becoming? She already became a Veela, or as much of a Veela as she would ever be. What else was there?

Moving back to the bed frustrated, she tried to clear her mind and fall asleep, but every time she closed her eyes, thoughts and memories replayed themselves; the memory of her lying in Harry's arms became more and more prominent. Why did Harry have to invade her thoughts like this? What was wrong with her and why did she keep flirting with him and why was she fighting the urge to run back to the window and yell out for them to wait for her so Harry wouldn't leave her sight?

Sitting back up in bed, Fleur noticed Ginny's letters again. Maybe Ginny knows, she thought to herself in a moment of levity. At least she understood the strange draw the young man had on a witch. It helped to hear the other girl's thoughts about Harry and maybe, just maybe, it'd help her organize her own.

~ . ~ . ~

19 June, 1993

Dear Harry Potter,

How do I say I'm sorry? You suffered all year with people blaming you for opening the Chamber of Secrets, when it was Tom Riddle possessing me through the diary. Why did I have to hurt you like that? Why couldn't I have just stopped it? Why did Malfoy have to put that diary in with my books last summer?



And then after all that, you still saved my life. You battled Voldemort. The second time in two years, from what I overheard my brother say. You faced and killed that monstrous basilisk for me and almost died if Dumbledore's Phoenix hadn't put its tear where you got bit.

I'm so sorry. I never wanted you to get hurt again, especially over me. Please forgive me.

~ . ~ . ~

Basilisk? He fought and was bit by a Basilisk? Fleur shook her head at the incredulous story. She'd heard parts over the last year, including two nights ago from Cedric in the maze, but not like this. This letter was different than the last letters as well. Ginny hurt, because she hurt him. She was terrified, because she added to the pain he already had, and after all of that, he still saved her life, just like he did for Gabrielle.

Thinking back to her promise last night, Fleur cringed. Ginny had made that same promise in the previous letters, then broke them. Fleur flipped a few more pages again, and found an entry from last summer.

~ . ~ . ~

31 August, 1995

Harry,

I'm so glad you're okay. When I saw the Death Mark above the forest the other night and knew you were in there, I clutched my wand and took off running. The twins chased me down and jumped on me before I could get to you, but I promise that if you are ever in trouble like that I will come to help you. I know I'm only thirteen and you're fourteen. I know I'm just Ron's little sister to you. I know that you will probably never see me the way I see you.

But I will always love you Harry. Not the stick-my-elbow-in-the-butter-because-I-saw-you type of love, but the type that you showed me; the type that says I would rather die than let something happen to you.

"Oh, god!"

Try as she might, Fleur could not erase the image of the little red-headed girl lying next to her older brothers, dead, her wand scorched from battle. But that little girl—the phrase brought a lump to her throat; how many 'little' boys and girls have suffered on this god-forsaken island—died because she believed in Harry. Not in Harry Potter, The-Boy-Who-Lived that she first learned about, but in Harry, the young wizard she had grown to know and love. That was why she fought the Death Eaters two nights ago, why she didn't go with her maman when Molly was helping the children escape.

She died for Harry, just as Harry was willing to die for Ginny, for the four Champions in the graveyard, for Fleur back at the school; just as Cedric was willing to come up closest to Harry and die for him, just as Krum had died for them.

Tears burst forth again as she thought about all the death, and moreover the suffering that boy Neville she heard about and Susan and others had to endure. She thought back to Seamus and what she saw in the picture, but above all, her thoughts revolved around Harry. She marveled at his spirit. The human spirit within him, and all of them, that thing that goes so far beyond the mere triviality of Wizard or Muggle, regardless of what the pure-blooded bigots said.

It struck her at that moment that she wasn't just a Veela. She was also human and had the same spirit. The revelation made her cry all the more as she realized that the biggest difference between them and her, was that her human spirit didn't measure up to theirs.

It was quite a while before Fleur was able to read again, but she finally started, reading through the tears that continued to fall.

I saw you last night, I couldn't sleep. I was in the hallway when I heard something and went up to see what it was. It was you. You were holding your scar. I know it's hurting and you don't want anyone else to know, so I won't say anything. But if it means anything about You-Know-Who, I will stand by your side with my wand in hand, because I believe in you that much Harry, even if you don't believe in yourself, and I am starting to get the idea that you don't. How can you not see in yourself, what Ron and Hermione and I see in you?

You're selfless, brave, shy, protective, caring, a great Quidditch player (maybe that should have been first). We talk about you Harry. We talk about all the good things in you. About how loyal you are, about how you never abandon your friends, about how you never try to bring attention to yourself, yet somehow it always shows up.

Please believe me Harry. There is so much in you. So much so, that if your scar means what I think it means, I am willing to die for you. I know this sounds corny. But it's the truth. I just hope I get to show it someday.

~ . ~ . ~

The image of Ginny at Hogwarts forced its way to the forefront of Fleur's thoughts again. But this time, her dead body was animated, standing amongst the carnage, looking at Fleur just like her maman did yesterday, weighing and measuring the French girl.

"I don't care about you being a Veela, are you a good enough human for my Harry?" The young redhead asked in Fleur's thoughts. "Are you willing to die for him? Do you love him enough to save him?"

Fleur shook with sobs, dropping the makeshift diary and curling into the pillow. It was too much, too fast. Everything she prided herself on in the past no longer mattered and everything that she ignored about herself was now important. This wasn't all about Harry, he was the mirror that reflected the truth back onto her, and the truth remained; Fleur was a beautiful Veela, but she was an ugly human being. It's no wonder she was bested by a fourteen year old wizard, why he was able to be the hero at the lake. He was a better human being.

A knock on the door surprised her.

"Fleur?"

She desperately tried to clear her throat so her voice would sound strong. "Oui?"

The door opened and Molly came in to see her on the bed in tears. Silently, Molly walked across the room, sat on the bed and pulled her into a hug, rocking her slightly and rubbing her back.

After fifteen or so minutes, Fleur excused herself and went to the bathroom. When she returned, Molly broke the silence.

"We've had our discussion with Harry."

"What deed 'e zay?"

"That he felt like it fell to him, and he was going to do what he could to put an end to the war as soon as possible. He has the books to learn about the Horcruxes, though there are other things about his connection and powers that he needs to learn to control, and maybe use."

"But 'e can't. I can't let 'eem do zhat!" Fleur set her jaw in defiance.

"I know. It scares me too. I don't like Harry touching anything dealing with the Dark Arts because I'm afraid what will happen to him. But Remus made too much sense. Harry's path has been set since his birth, and the only thing we can do, is love him enough that he won't be engulfed by the journey. His destiny and magic has been so intertwined with You-Know Who that he may have no other choice but to use some of the Dark Arts against him. One thing you need to know about Harry. If there's anyone who can do it, it's him."

"But at zhe cost of 'is soul? I won't allow zhat to 'appen." She lifted the makeshift book of letters from the bed. "Jhinnee would not allow zhat to 'appen!"

"What is that?" Molly whispered.

"I found it in zhe pillow case. When I pulled it out, I noticed zhe letter on zhe first page, I didn't want to read it at first, but zhere was just something about it." Fleur paused for a moment. "I wish I 'ad known 'er."

Molly hitched a tight smile. "I'm not sure about that Fleur, her nickname for anyone who spoke French was 'Phlegm,' because of the way your language sounds. She had quite the mouth, but she was a very special witch."

Fleur ran her hand across the book. "I zhink I found zhat out."

Molly put her hand on top of Fleur's and Fleur looked up at her.

"I'm worried," Molly began. "When he confronted Madame Bones in the kitchen yesterday, I've never seen him so cold."

"When 'e watched Dumbledore die, I saw 'is spirit break. I 'ave never seen zhat before and I never want to see zhat again in anyone. I never knew it could 'appen. Why 'im? Why does it always 'appen to 'im?"

"I don't know," Molly answered honestly.

"'E's been through so much. I thought 'e was just a leetle boy at zhe beginning of the year. Now, I know zhat 'e's so much more. 'E saved my sister. 'E saved Ginny. 'E's a 'ero. E's—"

"Lucky to have you with him," Molly supplied, surprising Fleur. "I'm sorry for this morning. I'm sorry for calling you 'Frenchie', I'm sorry for yelling at you and assuming things about you. But even more so, I'm sorry for saying that you're taking Harry away from me."

Fleur had to replay the words in her head a few times to grasp the meaning, but it was there. Molly was treating her like an equal. She truly didn't hold a grudge, even though she had every right to. Fleur began to see the beauty in Molly and it quickly extended to Ginny (or at least her mental picture of Ginny), Remus, Sirius, Cedric, even Krum. It wasn't just Harry that gave until it hurt. It was all of them and they all had one thing in common. The human spirit. In that moment, so much became clear.

"I'm zorry, Molly. I was rude to you. I was rude to your zon during the zchool year. I 'urt 'Arry zhe night we were chosen. I 'urt your Ronald by my arrogance, when 'e was zeemply attracted to zhe veela, not even to me. But zhey both zaved my zeester's life. Later we found out she wasn't een danger. But zhey ztill deed it. Please forgeeve me!"

The two witches hugged and cried, mourning the losses of friends and loved ones and those they never knew. They cried into the early in the afternoon when Fleur excused herself to the bathroom again for more tissues.

She came back into the room and sat down on the bed. "Zhank you, Molly."

"Fleur, you're still holding back. There's still something eating at you. What is it?"

Fleur shook her head slightly and gave Molly a little smile, amazed at the witch's intuition. She decided to be honest.

"Everything. All the zhings I thought were important, no longer are. Everything I thought I was, seem to no longer matter. I don't know where to start."

"Then start with Harry," Molly ventured.

Fleur's eyelids snapped open. "What do you mean by zhat?"

"I'm a . . . was a mother of six boys and a witch who was in love with Harry. I think that makes me an expert in teenagers, and a specialist for this particular discussion."

"You zhink I am in love with 'Arry?"

"Are you?"

"Non," she answered reflexively, realizing that she sounded exactly like Harry did earlier in the day. But her instincts kicked off again, the same instincts that told her yesterday morning that it wasn't true when she watched Remus and Sirius hugging Harry and thought that he was finally with someone who loved him. Obviously it was true that they loved him, so, could it be that Harry had already been in the presence of someone who loved. . . ."

Fleur's eyes were growing wider by the minute.

"Answer the question too fast?" Molly grinned.

Fleur shook her head, still not wanting to admit it. France. Have to get home and talk to maman. She'll love Harry. He could stay in - Stop this!

Molly laughed out loud at the play of emotions on Fleur's face.

"It's okay Fleur, we don't need to talk about that if you're not ready." Molly hugged her again and left the room to make a late lunch for the two of them, but not before telling the younger witch that they could talk about the other stuff over the meal.

Fleur turned back to the mirror and assessed what she saw before heading downstairs. At least she wasn't ashamed now. Whatever the next day brought, she'd be a different witch. Now she knew; it wasn't enough to be a beautiful Veela, she needed to be a beautiful human being as well. But something told her that was going to be much harder to do. It didn't matter though, she knew she could do it, she just needed the time to learn how.

A/Ns It's been more than a couple weeks since I last updated, I apologize. It's been a tough time as my mother passed away just after the holidays and on top of that, I am having to prepare for seminars (school) again. Life is in an uproar, but sometimes it feels good to just sit down and write.

Anyway, on to questions and responses and other things.

NEXT CHAPTER - Starts off in Diagon Alley (Yeah, we're not at the Burrow!). A couple more characters are introduced (minor for this fic, but canon).

Krum: There's been a couple of people who have pointed out that Krum was, in fact Bulgarian. This is true, to a point. Canon does not say that he is Bulgarian. It says that he played on the Bulgarian national Quidditch team and also spoke Bulgarian to his father. Anyone familiar with international sports knows that players with dual citizenship often has a choice to play on either team. This is how I have envisioned Krum, and for a specific reason, going back to his Grandfather (which you'll find out about in Part 2). I have chosen for Krum to be of mixed birth, German mother and Bulgarian father, speaking German in the home, but Bulgarian out and about (in Bulgaria) and taking on the Bulgarian last name, obviously. Friends who have lived in Bulgaria tell me this is common as well. All of this was going to come out in Part 2, but since I've had a couple people ask about it, I figured I'd share it. I am glad however, that you all have seen that detail, as it make me hopeful you're picking up on some other hints and foreshadows.

Fleur: No one has said anything, but I wanted to share that I am aware this fic has been heavy on Fleur Development so far. Harry's is coming soon, but it's not going to be the same. Also, this was the end of Ginny's letters. They were supposed to have all been in one chapter originally, but I thought it would be better to break them up between two chapters. It's not a plot device that will be dragged on through the story.

Cliches: For those of you wondering, Harry is not going to go shopping for new clothes in Diagon Alley, won't meet up with Griphook and reminisce about the first time he was there or any other cliches as such. He may buy clothes here or there, but the "Harry shopping for new clothes" cliché is really overused, IMO, as is the bonding cliché. Now, you may see it mentioned here, but any bonding (if there is one) won't fall into a cliché, I'll promise you that!

Nicks 244 - I hope you enjoyed Molly's reaction when she found Harry in bed with Fleur. I wanted both humor, and part of her devastation to show through. I think you may be a prophet! Awkward and funny it was (hopefully).

Venpex - Sirius/Remus and Fleur discussing everything in the last chapter would have been too hard to write, because I didn't want Fleur to deal with the Horcrux issue yet. But hopefully this chapter satisfies you a bit more! Like Nicks, you guessed right, early on in the very next chapter! Oh, and the 3-4 year difference, it goes away when . . . (evil, aren't I?)

Grimjowx - Thanks for the compliment (that goes to everyone, btw). I have to admit, when I read, "Talented writer you are." I started laughing because the first thing I thought of was Yoda. It was a perfect imitation of him.

Ladies and Gentlemen, may I introduce you to Master Odin: Thanks for leaving a review! I laughed hard at you being stared at by your co-workers.

For those of you who don't know, Master Odin is my Beta on my very first fic (Which is in hiatus right now). He's the one that helped put on and then take off my training wheels of fiction writing. Blame me for the bad stuff, thank him and PhoenixFanatic999 for the good stuff.



A big thanks to EVERYONE who has left reviews. They are a real encouragement to continue on!

## TWO MORE THINGS!

Want to see the pictures? - I was bored one night, and wanted to find a way to share with all of you the pictures of those whom I envision when I write. What came of that, is this: [www. wix . com/scrubbec/when-a-veela](http://www.wix.com/scrubbec/when-a-veela) (of course, without the spaces). As the story grows, so will the site. It's not anything spectacular, but it at least gets the pictures out there.

Beta - As I've said a few times, PhoenixFanatic999 is my beta for this and a few other fics, and does a great job on plotting, catching story holes, flow, etc. But once I get the story back, I like to have a second beta to check to make sure I've edited correctly, give grammar a final check, etc. If you'd be willing to do that, and you are very good at grammar and detail, please PM me.

Other than that, leave a review if you please! Thanks again for coming on this journey with me and I suspect the next chapter will be up the second weekend in February (quite possibly sooner).

A/N: A big thank you goes out to Master Odin who has decided to become my second Beta on this project. I am extremely grateful. On that note, both of my Beta's are writing new stories and I would love for you to show your appreciation of their work here by at least giving their first chapters a read and leaving a review. The names of the stories are in the Author's notes at the bottom of this chapter.

A/N2: My second Beta asked about my use of the second "s" in possessives. I thought it would be good to let you all know that I do that on purposes. It is not a mistake. In my academic world, I have to follow Turabian Style Manual (7th edition. . . how does Kate Turabian keep putting out editions when she's dead?) which dictates an "s" at the end of Proper noun possessives that end in an "s" sound, except for certain instances. I continue to follow that here since other style manuals have now made the switch and because if I don't, I'll fall back into the habit of doing it the old way, which is a big problem in my academic setting.

A/N3 One more chapter! Yes, I know, I said that they would be in France at the end of this chapter. However, this chapter ended up being fourteen thousand plus words with Author Notes, so I broke them up into two, but they do end up in France then (well . . . maybe, I'm not giving away any story secrets!)

...

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### HOW THE MIGHT FALL

Harry, Sirius, and Remus Apparated onto the steps of Gringotts. Looking out over Diagon Alley, they could see the venders still selling their wares and plenty of shoppers about, but a businesslike, rushed tenor had descended on the Alley; as if those who came were anxious to be done and out of such a public area.

Sirius put his arm on Harry and turned him towards the burnished bronze doors leading into Gringotts. Walking into the large marble hall, they found a goblin sitting behind the counter seemingly unoccupied at the moment.

"We would like to go to our vaults." Sirius informed him.

"And who might you be, sir?" the goblin asked, looking at him over the top of his glasses.

"Sirius Black. I need access to both my personal vault and the family vault. I believe Harry wants access to his as well."

The goblin remained silent as he slowly reached down behind the counter – Muggle banks didn't impress goblins much, but their security measures were a different story.

Sirius saw the movement and chuckled to himself. "There's no need to call the Aurors." He pulled the previous days' paper from his robe and placed it in front of the goblin.

"I'm no longer a wanted wizard."

The goblin snorted in disbelief before quickly pressing something below the counter. Two "cracks" of Apparition echoed off the marble walls and Harry found himself staring at the tip of a wand, held by a very large, very intimidating, black man; his partner was standing behind them.

"Is there a problem here?" The man questioned in a deep, rumbling voice.

Harry had always respected Dumbledore's ability to be in control of his surroundings, but this wizard took that concept to an entirely different level. The voice alone commanded respect, but coupled with his calm demeanor, physical stature, and . . . well, everything; this was a wizard to behold.

His younger partner however, exuded an erratic but entertaining air about her, especially as she morphed into a very ugly, older woman whose shrill voice rang out, "The problem is this worthless shame of my flesh staining the Black family name!"

Sirius spun around, blood draining from his face, and his eyes widening as he brandished his wand; but a large black hand reached around him from behind and pinned his wand and arm against his body.

"It is unwise to draw your wand," the older Auror informed Sirius.

Harry didn't care and drew his wand to come to his godfather's aid, but Remus put a hand on him. He looked up to see the older wizard shaking his head and desperately trying not to laugh.

The female Auror, currently sporting the body of Walburga Black, morphed into her original form – a cute, though slightly lantern-jawed, witch just a few inches taller than Harry.

"Mummy make you jumpy, dear cousin?" She waved off the older Auror.

"Tonks!" Sirius laughed, enveloping her in a tight hug and obviously impressed with the witch who was his favorite cousin. "How are you doing?"

"Splendid actually. I became an Auror to take on the likes of you, the big, bad, Sirius Black - Muggle-murderer extraordinaire!"

The large Auror standing behind Sirius winced at Tonks's lack of decorum. Harry looked around and saw a number of the goblins staring at them.

Tonks noticed them as well. She stepped away from Sirius and turned to the goblin behind the counter. "Did you call us about Sirius Black?"

The goblin nodded.

"Is this about him being wanted for multiple murders?"

Another nod.

Tonks raised her wand to her throat and whispered, "Sonorous," then addressed the bank.

"Sirius Black was declared innocent by the Ministry of Magic yesterday. He is to be given all rights and access as afforded any and every wizard."

She cancelled the spell before turning to her older partner. "Sorry, Shacklebolt, that probably should have been your call."

"Since I am the senior officer, have twenty-something years on you, and can whip your arse on the training course; I would say you're correct." His broad, welcoming smile told Harry that Sirius's cousin was already forgiven.

Remus decided to cut in at that moment, still a little protective of the woman he remembered as a little girl. "Hello Tonks."

"Er, um, hello—REMUS?"

He grinned and she threw her arms around him. "You've grown so old!" she teased.

"And you've finally grown out of your diapers," he shot right back.

"Want to come home with me t'night and see what I wear now?"

Remus turned bright red and Tonks let out a whoop that made half the Goblins jump, knocking over scales and scattering gold and silver coins across the floor. The older Auror grumbled good-naturedly about her lack of professionalism.

Harry stepped around the group and up to the counter. "While they're catching up, I would like to go to my vault please."

"What is your full name?"

"Harry Potter."

"Is that really Harry?" he heard Tonks ask behind him. Harry didn't have chance to answer as he felt someone poke him in the back rather hard.

"Hey, what the...!" Harry began as he spun around.

"Yep, it's really him," his godfather answered.

Harry turned around to face him and Tonks. "How much would it cost me for you to turn back into Hagrid and beat on Sirius for a while?" Spending time with Fleur was making Harry quite bold when it came to speaking with older women, though flirting was a different cauldron of potion that he wasn't willing to brew.

The look on Tonks's face elicited a deep booming laugh from the senior Auror. "It's about time someone put her in her place. Hello, Mr. Potter. I am Kingsley Shacklebolt." He offered a mammoth hand that swallowed Harry's as she shook it. Even Sirius's and Remus's hands were lost in his.

"If my partner is finished with her family affairs, we should get back to the department and report to them that nothing is amiss."

Tonks agreed and hugged Sirius and Remus again. Harry was surprised when she next hugged him tightly, whispering into his ear, "I'll see you tonight at the meeting. We'll prank Sirius."

Harry smiled; he liked her already.

The two Aurors walked out the front doors and Apparated back to the ministry. Harry wondered why they could Apparate into the bank, but not out of it, and asked the goblin as much.

"Protective charms are set against Apparation, but they recognize Aurors when they're called for in emergencies," the goblin answered.

"How?"

"That's not for you to know, young wizard."

"Well, that was interesting," Sirius quipped with a trace of humor, still looking at the doors his cousin had just exited. He faced the goblin. "May we go to our vaults now?"

"Keys?"

"You know the Black family vaults do not use keys," Sirius reminded the goblin in a clipped voice.

The goblin inclined his head to Sirius before asking Harry for his. He produced the key and handed it over for inspection.

Satisfied, the goblin looked over his shoulder. "Madgouger, Take these three to the vaults."

Madgouger led them through another door and down a passage to the railway carts. Harry and Sirius crawled into the first one, Remus

and Madgouger into the second and they began their descent, whipping through the underground caverns and heading deeper and deeper until they stopped in front of Harry's vault.

Harry hopped out and went to the door, handing over his key to the goblin. Madgouger opened the vault and stepped aside so Harry and Sirius could enter the dark, sealed room.

"How much do you think I should take?" Harry asked.

"I don't know, what do you think you'll be spending your gold on? Or should I ask, whom?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "I guess it depends on how long everything lasts. If I have my trunk with me, I can carry enough to get by for a long time, but I don't think I'll need all that."

"What if you end up in France?"

"France?" the goblin asked from the entrance. "We have good working relations with our cousins at Sorciers Banque de France. We can transfer funds if you'd like. It would be safer than carrying bags of Galleons."

Harry and Sirius looked at each other. "What's the fee?" Sirius asked the goblin.

"Three percent."

"And the limit?"

"A hundred galleons a day and funds are made available the next day, but you would have no vault to use there. For seventy galleons, we can do a vault transfer," – he looked around Harry's vault – "up to half your vault's contents. It would go out in an hour, but you would not have access to it in France until a week from tomorrow."

"It's a good idea," Sirius said. "If the ministry falls to Voldemort, the new government will probably attempt to seize everything they can. The goblins will fight, but it got right nasty the last time and hundreds of families lost everything in their vault. I think you should transfer as much as you can to France so it's out of the reach of the Ministry whether you end up there or not."

"Are you going to do it too?"

The goblin and Sirius both laughed lightly. "The Black family has money stashed in vaults all over the continent. How else do you think I got your Firebolt for you?"

"You said you told them to take the gold from your vault in Gringotts?"

The goblin snorted. "Which one?"

"What?" Harry was confused.

"Goblins love naming their banks Gringotts. There are three others on the continent."

It was moments like these that reminded Harry he didn't grow up in the wizarding world and what he didn't know because of it, could cost him dearly at some point in the future. Like this, for instance; what if he didn't have Sirius with him? Would he have known what to ask? It did seem like a good idea to get some of his gold out of England.

Harry put the questions out of his mind for the moment and asked Madgouger to do the vault transfer. Sirius confirmed that he was Harry's legal guardian and approved it. For the time being, Harry shoved a hundred Galleons and a stack of sickles into a bag.

Back in the cart, they descended deeper into the caves, stopping after three drops that left Harry feeling like his stomach was a few hundred feet back up on the track.

Sirius got out of the cart and, along with Madgouger, pressed his finger on the door. A Magical Signature Verification charm agreed that it was Sirius Black and a hiss escaped as the vault opened. Sirius's personal vault was just as full as Harry's, but it also held trinkets and treasures from his life that he'd stored over the years.

He pulled a box down from a shelf and blew the dust off. After removing the top, he reached in and palmed whatever was in the box.



"This was your father's," Sirius said to Harry quietly, almost reverently.

"What is it?"

"It's a symbol of one of our greatest times together. We were in Italy and stayed up all night trying to out-drink a couple groups of Marines—one British and one American, I think.

A ghost of a smile crossed his face, memories of a lost age and a damn good friend. "We noticed a number of them wearing what they called military rings. We thought it was a great idea and figured with everything we'd been through already, we should have one made for ourselves. It was just before we 'officially' joined the order.

"The night your parents were murdered," Sirius continued, his eyes focused on memories that Harry could only guess at, his voice filled with emotion. "I let Hagrid take you and I went back into the house to take care of James's and Lily's bodies. In those days, the Death Eaters were casting Inferi spells on the dead to make them do things in public for the sake of entertainment and humiliation."

He stopped for a second. Harry watched him choke back a specific memory before continuing. "I noticed he was wearing his ring around his neck on a chain. I took it and after taking care of the bodies, brought it, and mine, back to my vault, gave the chain to Remus, and set off to kill Peter.

Sirius extended his arm. "I want you to have it now. It belongs to you."

Harry hesitated. "Did Wormtail have one?" He didn't want anything that linked his father with that traitor, the Marauder's Map notwithstanding.

"No," Remus answered. "Your father and the two of us took a two week trip to the continent. Peter said he had family business he had to attend to."

Harry took the ring in his hand. There was nothing magical about it, but he found it to be far more meaningful than any possession he owned save his Invisibility cloak.

Harry surveyed the ring. The band was gold, the stone a large, flat, black sapphire ruby, on which a Gryffindor lion's face made of gold sat, its mane extending back to the band on either side. The eyes were diamonds and the mouth was a deep red ruby.

Sirius heaved a sigh, lifted his own ring out of the box and slid it on his finger. "We were young, full of money and foolishness, and full of ourselves. We thought once the Marauders were a part of the Order, we'd destroy Voldemort and his Death Eaters within a few months."

Remus, who had removed a chain from around his neck, put his ring on as well. "You and James were full of money and we were all full of ourselves, but that doesn't negate two of the best weeks I've ever had." He handed the chain to Harry. "It was the chain your father had. Put your ring on it and wear it around your neck for safekeeping. Whenever you feel it or see it, remember that you still have family that love you."

"Family?" Harry asked, thinking of the Dursleys and knowing they didn't love him at all.

"Yeah, family," Sirius answered. "We're your family."

Harry smothered his emotions and put the chain around his neck. The ring was heavy, but not overly so. He tucked it under his shirt and the three of them went to the next vault over. After the same procedure with the goblin, the door opened and Sirius stepped in. A few minutes later, he came back out with the Pensieve (much smaller than Dumbledore's, but ornate) and they all re-entered their carts to ascend out of the caves.

X O X O X O X

"Want some lunch?" Sirius asked as they left the bank.

"Sure," Harry answered. "Where are we going?"

"We should stay around here. The Leaky Cauldron? I haven't eaten there in ages."

A few minutes later, they found themselves seated at a table and their orders being taken.

"So, how are you doing with everything that's going on?" Sirius asked Harry when the waitress left.

"Fine, I guess. How are you doing?"

"I think what Sirius means," Remus clarified with a touch of humor, "is how are you coping with what happened the other day."

"Oh, okay I guess."

Sirius leaned into the table. "Just okay?"

"I guess so." Harry sat back in his chair. How did he feel about what he'd seen and done over the last few days? Did he even want talk about it? "I guess it still feels like a dream," he temporized. "I haven't really had time to think about everyone dying."

"It's a lot to take in," Sirius agreed. "Molly wanted me to apologize to you for not thinking about what room she put you in."

"It's okay—"

"No, it's not," Remus interrupted. "Harry, stop making so little of everything that happens to you and everything you feel. It makes it exceedingly difficult for the two of us and Molly to help you."

"Not to mention a certain French witch," Sirius reminded him. "And I'm not just hexing your wand either. You're going to have to learn how to let people help you."

Harry fumbled with his utensils and was thankful for the fast service when the food was placed on the table a few seconds later.

"So, how do you feel about Fleur?" Sirius asked once the waitress left again.

Nice subject change, Harry thought as a humorless smile creased his face. Out of the burning potion and into the scalding cauldron, just wonderful!

"I . . . I like Quidditch. Do you think the Cannons will ever be any good?"

Harry's attempt at a second change of subject fell flat.

"That's not going to work," Sirius answered, "So, one more time, how do you feel about her?"

"Why is it important?" he asked, getting a bit annoyed. "I think I have a few more important things to worry about right now."

"So, you're not interested in her then?" Sirius pressed for clarification.

"I didn't say that."

"Then you are interested in her."

"I didn't say that either."

Sirius turned to Remus, "Does this conversation sound familiar?"

Remus smirked. "Power converters."\*

"And how."

Sirius took another bite of his lunch before trying again with Harry. "I know I tease you a lot, but right now I'm being serious, no pun intended. Fleur Delacour is a whole lot of witch. She's smart, beautiful, and it seems, knows how to handle her wand as well. Having Veela genes only promises one of the three. She has her faults like everyone else, but she is a dem fine witch, sir, a dem fine witch."

Harry could only grunt his agreement, not sure what else to say.

"Maybe I'm going about this the wrong way. Let's start over." Harry waited as Sirius took another bite of his food before continuing the interrogation.

"I've noticed you and Fleur spending a lot of time together and over the last few days, it looks like the two of you have grown quite close. Relationships can be confusing at the best of times and with what the two you have done together, you probably have a hundred different thoughts running through your mind. Is there anything you'd care to share, or want to ask about?"

Harry played with his food and thought back over the last couple of days. Forty-eight hours ago, he was at Hogwarts. Everyone was still alive and Fleur's biggest worry was her sister's coming of age.

Now, Harry was an integral part of a new war, the result of an active prophecy and for all intents and purposes, a sacrificial lamb. Two other Champions and almost all of his friends at Hogwarts were dead and Fleur had become... what? A friend? Ron was his friend and he never climbed into Harry's bed when Harry was having a bad dream. Hermione was his friend and while she often fretted over him, she never touched him like Fleur did when she was caring for him.

What does that make Fleur? How did Harry feel about her? Was it the same way he liked Cho?

It can't be, he argued with himself. I was completely gobsmacked around Cho this year. So if it's like Cho, why can I joke with Fleur without being tongue-tied, except when she— "I don't get it," Harry finally confessed. "She teases me, then blushes. Why do that? Why would she help me dream about her? She knows the types of dreams I'm having and why does she always end up in bed with me?"

"Maybe because you're very good there and quite gorgeous to boot," said the young waitress, who looked like she was a year or two out of school. She smiled and set three more bottles of butterbeer on the table before taking the empty ones and sauntering back to the bar.

Harry could feel himself turning bright red. It seemed to be an hourly occurrence anymore.

"Impressive," Sirius joked. "Even with the longer hair you're sporting now."

"Haven't had time to get a haircut," Harry mumbled.

"I'm sure Fleur loves running her hands through it." Sirius saw the look on Harry's face and quickly added on, "I'm only making an observation. If you find her doing it, leave it. Now, as to Fleur being in bed with you, maybe Remus can explain it."

"It's probably because she likes you," Remus said. "How much I don't know, she may not even know, but she does like you."

"Good, I like her too."

"I don't mean 'like you' in the way Hermione or Ron did," he reminded Harry.

Harry stopped, his fork halfway to his mouth. "There's no way she could like me like that."

"Why not? Remus asked, but Harry didn't answer. He remembered that he had a fork in his hand and put it back down on the plate.

"I heard what your two schoolmates said to you last night," Sirius began. "You do know that they see the same thing we do, right?"

Harry snorted. "I have no idea what they were talking about."

Sirius chuckled. "That's because a Ravenclaw was explaining it." Before Harry could ask, he continued, "Madame Bones told us her House last night."

"Oh."

"Basically," Remus jumped in, "The young Ravenclaw was saying that Fleur's crying on your shoulder like she did shows that she might like you."

"Not to mention," Sirius added, "that Fleur was watching her cry on your shoulder last night as well. Whether she admits it or not, it bothered her."

"But how could she – why would it bother her? I mean, she was going on all spring about how her sister likes me and before the last task, how Fleur's going to have to protect me."

Sirius was shaking his head. "I doubt even Dumbledore could begin to fathom the depths of a witch's mind. Maybe that was her way of flirting with you before she really knew if she liked you or not."

"So what am I supposed to do now?"

"Do you like her?" Sirius asked again.

"I don't know, I mean, at the beginning of the year I could really care less about her. She was stuck-up and arrogant, but she seemed to change over Spring term. We had a lot of fun talking about things."

"My guess, then," Sirius surmised, "is to do nothing specific. Just let things develop naturally and enjoy it. If she wants a relationship and you feel that you like her, then reciprocate; but there are two things you need to know. First, do not play with her heart. If you don't like her in that way, tell her so. It may hurt a bit in the beginning, but it's only fair. Second, you're only fourteen and you have a lifetime ahead of you so don't make any foolish commitments, but also remember that a witch like Fleur only comes around once in a lifetime."

"A lifetime, right," Harry scoffed. "How can I even think about a lifetime knowing about the prophecy? What about this?" He pointed to his scar. "I bet she doesn't even know about it, or what it means."

"She figured most of it out by herself this morning. Don't worry, we danced around the details." Sirius finished his stew and pushed the bowl away. "Let me ask you this, if you were back at Hogwarts and there was no prophecy and no strange magic in you, would you like to go on a date with her, maybe even give her a goodnight snog?"

Harry tried desperately to hide it, but a look that screamed "I already have" planted itself on his face.

"You didn't!" Sirius grinned. "When?"

"When what?"

"Harry, either you're going to start talking, or Fleur is going to hear every last embarrassing thing I know about you."

"At least that's not that much—"

Remus laughed in a way that made Harry want to feel for his wand. "Do I need to remind you that we were around when you were a baby? We've seen you do many things that you have no idea about. You were a very funny baby."

"Imagine Harry's embarrassment tonight," Sirius followed up, "when I remind Tonks in front of Fleur how thirteen month old Harry tried to suckle from the breast of a nine year old Tonks the one time she came with me to visit the Potters."

The two adults at the table laughed. Then Remus started in, "Sirius, do you remember the day Harry pulled off his diapers in public and—"

"Alright, enough!" a red-faced Harry conceded. "This morning, we kissed after Remus left. It was just a peck on the lips."

"No it wasn't," Sirius corrected. "I can tell by the way you're looking at everything but at us."

"That's because I'm embarrassed."

"Liar."

"Either way, do you think I'm daft enough to tell you anything more?"

Remus broke out in laughter. "You're a smart wizard, Harry."

The check arrived and Sirius paid it before they went to the chocolate shop. Harry spent twenty minutes looking for something to bring back to Fleur as Sirius and Remus watched from the outside.

After finding what he wanted and paying for it, the owner covered it, shrunk it down, and put a number of charms on it. Harry slid the purchase into his robe along with instructions on how to remove the charms and stepped out of the store, when he heard someone yelling for his Godfather. He looked up to see Tonks and her partner running down the street, brandishing their wands.

"Tonks, what's wrong?" Sirius called out.

"The Ministry has fallen," the deep voice of Shacklebolt informed him. "There had to be over two-hundred Death Eaters that infiltrated the Ministry. The Auror's department was decimated and the Hitwizards were holding an office-wide meeting, they're all dead."

"Hogwarts all over again," Sirius muttered. "Madame Bones?"



"Don't know," Tonks answered. "She was with us making a report to the goblin liaison board, but she went back to her office – her niece and niece's friends were all there visiting. We never saw them again."

Harry's heart dropped through his stomach and a lump lodged itself in his throat.

"More importantly at this point," Shacklebolt interrupted, "it would be prudent to get Harry out of Diagon Alley."

They agreed and Remus, who was closest, reached over to grab Harry's arm, already hearing sounds of Apparation reverberating off façades, walls, and windows. As Remus turned on the spot, a strange squelching noise zipped up the street. Harry felt the beginnings of the squeeze of Apparition and then nothing else.

It was too late. Fifty or more Death Eaters, fresh from their part in the takeover of the Ministry, had Apparated into Diagon Alley.

Harry considered his first curse. The idea worked once, why not twice? He shouted "Serpensortia!" four times and four snakes spouted out of Harry's wand, each larger than the snake he'd summoned two days earlier.

"Sīh ôth snā theth!" He commanded and they slithered towards the enemy.

Screams were now erupting up and down Diagon Alley as Death Eaters randomly cast spells, killing or injuring some and humiliating others.

The four adults with Harry had seen enough. They brought their wands level and curses streaked out across the Alley. Harry followed up with his own series of jinxes and curses. The Death Eaters returned the favor and Harry suddenly found himself in his third battle in as many days. He cast a shield charm for the older wizards (and witch).

A killing curse spat out from a Death Eaters wand at Remus. Shacklebolt twitched his own wand and a picnic table in front of Fortescue's ice cream parlor next door leaped into the air,

intercepting the curse and a dangerously close distance. They were sprayed with splinters and chunks of wood.

"Tonks!" Shacklebolt boomed out. "Madame Bones already declared an open state of war. Kill them."

Nymphadora Tonks regripped her wand and let loose a series of Killing Curses that ripped through Death Eaters, windows, and walls on the other side of the alley. Shacklebolt's wand spat out green death in a less impressive, but more controlled and effective manner.

It was forgotten in the intervening years of peace, but the when war is declared, the Killing curse is legal for those fighting against the enemy.

Harry dropped his shield charm. Ignoring the burning sensations of the newly embedded slivers and thinking about Neville, Susan and Cho, he raged and threw a cutting curse he had read about in one of the books. The closest Death Eater moved for a wand-block, but the curse cut through the wand and took him mid-waist. Harry quickly followed up, casting his own Killing Curse and hitting the already wounded Death Eater in the face.

Then, just like two nights ago, the Horcrux inside Harry stirred, feeding him even more anger, rage, and power. He cast curses with vehemence, the tip of his wand dancing in the sun. Everything slowed down and he was able to watch spells exit from his wand, tracking them across the open space to their target.

Diagon Alley was ablaze in cursed colors. More windows exploded and signs were blown off walls from errant curses and attempted kill shots. The Dark Mark had appeared over shops as Death Eaters exited, leaving nothing moving behind them.

Wizards, hags, and dark creatures emptied out of Knockturn Alley, some fighting against the Death Eaters, most fighting with them, and a few happily cursing anything that moved, regardless of loyalty. Diagon alley turned into a kill zone.

The last snake Harry had conjured found another victim, pumping its poison into the bloodstream through the fangs sunk into the Death Eater's leg. A squelching noise ripped though Diagon Alley once more.

"It's time," Shacklebolt called out.

Harry felt Remus grab his arm and saw Sirius do the same to the two Aurors. His body pressed in on itself and went through the normal uncomfortable feelings of Apparition. He opened his eyes and found himself standing in the tranquil field behind the Burrow.

"We have to go back!" he yelled. "We have to save them!"

"No," Shacklebolt ordered, wand still in hand and blood spotting his robes. "If we want to save the wizarding world, we must retreat, regroup, plan, and then attack on our terms, out of our strengths, and on a battlefield of our choosing. The side that chooses the battlefield has already won the battle."

"Harry," Sirius whispered in his ear fervently, "Don't get yourself killed so easily. They'd come after you, he'd come after you. Are you ready to face Voldemort again?"

Harry didn't have a chance to respond as Mrs. Weasley raced out the back door and down through the yard. Fleur came out a few seconds later, running as fast as her legs would carry her.

"What 'appened?" Fleur yelled out, already reaching the fence and twenty yards behind Molly.

"The Ministry's fallen and Diagon Alley is a massacre," Shacklebolt answered.

Mrs. Weasley, who was close enough to be heard without shouting, was caught dead in her tracks. "Is it as bad as they say?"

"Probably worse," Sirius answered. "I saw dozens of Dark Marks going up all over the place."

Mrs. Weasley tensed. "Let's get back under the wards. The wireless says Dark Marks have started appearing above Hogsmeade as well."

Fleur ran right by her, tearing through the field until she reached Harry and threw her arms around him, hugging him tightly.

She stepped back but didn't release him. "'Arry, you 'ave blood all over you!" she cried out, frantically looking for wounds on his head, face, and neck.

"It's nothing."

"DON'T TELL ME IT'S NOZZING!" Fleur yelled, continuing the frenzied search and falling back into a deeper accent. "You don't bleed for nozzing!"

"Fleur," Remus interrupted. "I'd feel better under the Protective Charms and much better in the Burrow."

Fleur nodded and took Harry's hand as they walked back. The wireless was on and a frightened voice was frantically explaining that the Ministry had fallen. As Molly had said, Dark Marks were seen floating over Hogsmeade and now Diagon Alley and Godric's Hollow, the largest of wizard/Muggle mixed villages.

Fleur led Harry to the sitting room and settled him on the couch, conjuring towels and cleaning him up, again.

"Haven't we done this before?" Harry smirked, a little proud of his nonchalant delivery in light of his own anger and the frenetic energy that encapsulated the burrow at the moment.

"Eetz not funny," Fleur protested meekly.

"Sorry, just trying to make you laugh." Harry thought he saw the corner of her lip pull up.

"Ow do you do zhat?" Fleur asked.

"What?"

"You 'ave been in another battle, but you worry about me laughing instead. 'Ow come you always care so much?"

"I don't know," he answered honestly, and was unable to stop himself before the next words spilled out of his mouth. "I guess it's just easier to care with some people."

He distinctly saw both corners of her lips pull up this time and a cute pinkish hue appeared on her cheeks.

She changed the subject. "Ow did you get all zhesse splinters? It's going to take forever to get zhem out, get comfortable."

Forever ended up being about an hour to identify, remove, and clean the remaining wounds from dozens of splinters in Harry's face, neck, and hands. She carefully cast the Accio spell on each splinter, stopping every couple of minutes to wipe off the blood that seeped from some of the deeper wounds left by them.

It took most of that hour as well for Harry to fully swallow the fury from being pulled out of the battle. Innocent people were dying and he had the ability to make their murders pay. Why run? Why not stay and kill every last one of them? How many of those Death Eaters had killed his friends, his housemates, his teachers? This was his chance to get back at them.

But what Sirius said in the clearing was also right. His was a bigger calling. Hopefully, he'd have the chance to visit the suffering on the one who started it all and he'd be damned well ready for it when that time came, regardless of what it took. After watching the massacre in the alley, there was no doubt about that. Shacklebolt was right. They were at war.

Fleur's ministrations gradually pulled his mind back to the Burrow – and the reality that he may have just lost four more classmates, and it seemed, three friends. That was until he heard Shacklebolt tell the adults in the kitchen that Madame Bones, Susan, and the others all made it out safely. Madame Bones's Patronus had just informed him when he was doing a sweep of the grounds with Tonks.

Harry relaxed as Fleur worked across his forehead. "Just one more and we're finished. I don't zhink zhey'll leave scars."

"Good, I'd hate to have a scar on my forehead."

Fleur snorted and her wand moved as she summoned the last splinter. It ripped straight through the skin and Harry winced.

"Serves you right! I might 'ave to start charging you for medical services pretty soon," she teased as she wiped his face clean and handed his glasses back to him.

He put them on and reached into his robes that were lying across the chair next to him. "Charge me? Would you accept something from the chocolate shop instead?"

"Oui," she said in a much softer voice.

He brought out the package and reversed the charms. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Fleur's slight grin and something different about her eyes. He chalked it up to anticipation and suddenly became nervous that he'd bought the wrong thing.

"I tried to think of what you would like. I remembered you talking about the food at Hogwarts so I figured you wouldn't want anything too heavy and since you've been away from home for so long I thought. . . ." Harry ran out of steam and lowered his head slightly in embarrassment. "It was probably kind of a daft way to decide I guess—"

"Arry," Fleur said softly, putting her finger on his lips. "Whatever it is, it will be wonderful."

Harry breathed deeply and pulled out a Chocolate and Crème Torsade, topped with Pearl Sugar and dark chocolate drizzled across the top from the bag. He held his breath and the pastry out for her, noticing his hand shaking. At least she'll think it's from the battle, I hope.

She cupped her hands and Harry laid the Torsade in them, noticing for the first time how delicate her hands were.

Fleur studied the pastry for a second before taking a dainty bite. Her eyelids fluttered closed and a purr escaped the back of her throat. Some of the cream leaked out. She wiped it off with her finger and licked it clean, using the tip of her tongue.

Harry blushed.

Fleur bit her lip and giggled – having realized what she was doing. "It is very good. 'Ow did you know to get zhis one?"

Harry's blush went even deeper. He could lie to her, but something compelled him to tell the truth, even though he knew how bad it sounded. "Do you promise not to laugh?"

She was piqued with curiosity now.

"Oui. I promise," she answered, her eyes wide and a hint of sugar on her lips.

That sugar looked so good, Harry thought, envisioning himself leaning in to her, tilting his head slightly to the side before running the tip of his tongue across her sweet lips, only to kiss them and make sure he didn't miss anything.

Harry caught himself and focused on the present again, and a Fleur who was sitting expectantly for an answer, but she smiled even more and He had a feeling she knew what he was thinking.

"I'm waiting."

His eyes went wide.

She giggled. "For you to tell me how you knew which one to get."

"Oh, that. Yeah, well. It's sorta embarrassing."

"I promise I will not laugh, Ça va - Okay?"

Harry sighed and looked down at his hands. "I was trying to find something that kinda reminded me of you and I looked at a bunch of things but none of them were right. There were rich dark chocolate candies but they were too heavy and I knew you didn't like that; they had white chocolate and it kinda reminded me of your hair and being sweet but it was just candy and you're so much more; then I remembered you saying something about French pastries and your French and I found one that looked wonderful and alluring but had a bit hard, flaky surface like you to hide and protect all the good and warm and gooey and wonderful stuff on the inside. . . ."

Harry closed his eyes and grimaced.

"Please don't let that sound as bad as I think it did," he muttered.

When she didn't answer, he peered up to find Fleur just inches away, her eyes glistening, lips moist, and hands – devoid of pastries – reaching up to caress both cheeks. She pulled him in to her and Harry closed his eyes. He felt her breath on his lips, the warmth of her lips inviting him to lean in and taste her.

But instead of the kiss, all he noticed was a green light that flashed in the room.

\*Since one of my beta's missed the connection, I decided to make sure to remind you of Sirius's and Remus's discussion of Harry being like his father and Sirius making the reference to Star Wars in chapter three.

A/N I think after the story is posted a while, I'm going to delete most of these author notes simple because they're upping my word count too much, but it's a great way to communicate with reviews and the like.

My two Betas are working on stories that I want you to check out. PhoenixFanatic999 is writing a Harry Potter/Twilight crossover that is really good so far, with far more grit than sparkle (ahem). Check out his fic [Pixie Dust Restoration](http://www.fanfiction.net/s/7751722/1/Pixie_Dust_Restoration) [www.fanfiction.net/s/7751722/1/Pixie\\_Dust\\_Restoration](http://www.fanfiction.net/s/7751722/1/Pixie_Dust_Restoration)

Master Odin has one coming out soon. I will link to it when it is goes online.

Anyway, on to my reviewers -

Venpex: Ahh, how we would love for Harry to share his adventures and have Fleur help him break down his walls, but that's assuming Fleur is over these issues. Remember, she just learned about them and what she needs to do, but doing it, is such a different story. Eventually, they might get there though.

Heliosion: I ask you to be patient with me on resolving relationship crisis and the lingering drama. Also, Harry's descent into the darkness will come in its time, and it won't be glossed over, I promise, but in order to tell the story right, there are a number of things that need to happen. Don't worry however, even in this story



of you look hard enough, you'll find a couple clues to that end, even more in the next.

Nicks: You are right on about Molly, and dead on about her not thinking of him as a child. I tried to work that in the story itself, but no matter what I did, it broke the flow too much.

TNT: Thanks for the compliment on pacing. Character development in the way I'm doing it can get tedious, so I'm glad you like the pacing and hope the frustration is more at how they are acting, and not on the time spent or way of describing their development. If so, PM and let me know why so I can take it into consideration, k? As for Harry and Fleur being together; so what do you think after this chapter?

Hpnut1: Thank you for your condolences. I appreciate them tremendously.

NyaaMe0W: Great encouragement and greatly appreciated. There are some great Harry/Fleur fics out there, but not enough IMO. To rate mine up there with Letters by TheEndless7 or Dagger and Rose by Perspicacity; is an honor, but I'm not sure I'd put it that high. Their stories really set the mark for this pairing (as do one or two others).

Everyone else: Thanks so much for all your reviews and please keep them coming. As much as I and others don't want to say that we write for reviews, they do get and keep us excited about writing the stories that bounce around in our heads.

A/N: When a foreign language is spoken by two people in this fic, it will show up without any accents. To mark it as foreign, some Nouns that are easily understood will be used instead of English words (i.e. Vater instead of father if it's German).

I still owe my beta's a BIG 'thank you' for the work they have done. Master Odin and PhoenixFanatic999, thank you for helping make this story what it is, especially Phoenix, who has helped me with story development from day one. Poor guy. I'm also thankful that Master Odin has jumped in to be the proof reader. But once again, I ended up doing two series of edits AFTER I got this back from him, so any mistakes, are definitely mine!

Hope you all enjoy the chapter!

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### BLACK SUNRISE

Fleur's heart melted as she listened to Harry explain how he chose a simple pastry for her.

He's so adorable.

". . . Hide and protect all the good and warm and gooey and wonderful stuff on the inside."

Little thief is stealing my heart!

"Please don't let that sound as bad as I think it did."

Still so unsure of himself – where will I ever find someone else like this? Wizards twice his age don't see me like he does.

I should have kissed him first thing this morning like I wanted to.

I should kiss him now.

That's right 'Arry, keep your eyes closed—

Surprised to see me this close? Is this what you want? I heard that Cho girl, you're a beginner, That's okay. I'll help.

His skin feels so good against my hands—

His lips are trembling—

I can feel his breath—

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?

'Arry be careful!

X O X O X O X

The fireplace flashed and Harry jumped to the side of the mantle, his wand already in hand as he pressed himself against the wall. Someone traveling to the Burrow unannounced exited the fire that had turned green with floo travel. Harry jumped him from behind, wrapping his foot around one of the visitor's legs and pulling, tripping the man and riding him to the floor before sticking his wand in the back of his neck.

"Who are you?" Harry demanded

Fleur's face fell. There's that horrible dead voice again. Where did my 'Arry go?

"Harry? It's me, Charlie Weasley."

"Charlie? CHARLIE? Oh bollocks I'm" – Harry remembered Remus's test yesterday morning– "What did you and Bill break last fall before dinner when I was here?"

"The picnic table," he replied.

Harry got up off him and gave him a hand. "Sorry about that, you okay?"

Charlie wiped off the remains of his floo travel. "Don't apologize. Mum floo-ed me early this morning and told me what happened after the last task on Saturday, but she didn't know I was coming and

neither did you; never apologize for safety and caution."

Harry gave him a confused look.

"Remember, I work with dragons, it's our motto." Charlie lightened up considerably and even flashed a smile. "By the way, I put my memories of the first task in a Pensieve and shared them with everyone at the dragon reserve. They were all amazed by your skill on a broom, though I have to admit you were their second favorite memory."

The second favorite memory? 'Arry on a broom is amazing, what could. . . uh oh.

"Yeah?" Harry asked. "Who was their favorite memory? Krum, or that beautiful French goddess who almost got her skirt burned off to everyone's delight?"

Oh, Zut! 'ARRY! Fleur was beginning to blush.

"I'm on a dragon reserve, Harry. Who do you think? They didn't make 'em like that when I was in school."

"Non?" Fleur finally spoke up. "'Ow did zhey make us back zhen?"

Charlie spun around so fast his foot caught in the rug and he tripped, falling back to the floor in a glowing red ball of embarrassment.

"Harry, would you mind getting the salt from the cupboard?" Charlie mumbled. "I've found 'foot' always tastes better with a little salt."

Fleur laughed, finding the amusing comment disarming.

"Mum told me Harry was here with his, um, actually she just smiled at that part, but she never said anything about it being one of the other Champions," Charlie said. "I'm sorry for embarrassing you."

"I zhink you were the zhe one embarrassed, no?" Fleur answered in a good humor. "Zhat's okay, it was entertaining and 'Arry needed a good laugh after today."

Embarrassed or not, Charlie became serious, pushing himself up off the floor (a second time) and sitting in the chair next to the wall that divided the sitting room from the kitchen. "What happened?"

Fleur cut off Harry as he was about to answer, not wanting to lose the lighthearted mood just yet. There would be enough seriousness in the evening. Of course, it was also time to pay Harry back for turning her into absolute goo a few moments ago.

Well, if nothing else, this is going to be a playful relationship.

"Your maman caught 'Arry and me in bed together zhis morning."

Instead of blushing, Harry's jaw dropped. Charlie took one look at him and threw his head back, roaring with laughter. "Remind me to tell you a story about her catching me in bed with a witch whose first name began with 'Nymph'."

Fleur didn't understand the nasty smile that quickly spread across Harry's face, nor why it got twice as wide a few minutes later when Harry reappeared with Sirius in tow, after Molly finished fawning over her son.

"Nymphadora, you said?" Sirius asked as Charlie finished the story.

"Yep, what a name. Imagine your mum catching you in bed with her."

"It'd be a cause for concern, I'm sure," Sirius said off-handedly.

"You know," Charlie continued, "it's strange sitting here talking to you again, I was what, nine the last time you were at the Burrow?"

"Something like that," Sirius answered. "I wonder, do you remember Nymphadora's last name?"

"Yeah, Tonks. Why do you ask?"

"Did you know her mum's last name?"

"No. . ." Charlie answered.

Fleur picked up on Charlie's apprehension and Harry, sitting next to her, grinning mischievously. Fleur had to admit to herself, that grin looked oh so cute on him.

"It's Black," Sirius informed him.

Charlie paled. "Black?"

"Black," he repeated.

"As in. . . ."

"My Cousin, daughter of Andromeda Tonks Neé Black, my father's sister." Sirius deadpanned.

Charlie paled even more. "I never knew. How, how is she?"

Tonks popped out from behind. "Wotcher, Charlie! I'm fine, thanks for asking."

Charlie jumped out of his chair, but lost his footing and for the third time in less than fifteen minutes, fell to the ground. Tonks reached out for him, catching his hand, but his momentum was too much and he pulled her down on top of him.

"Charlie!" Molly bellowed. "Did I not tell you that I don't want to see that EVER in my house!"

Gales of laughter rang out as Charlie turned red again. Tonks gave him a peck on the lips and helped him up.

Ooh, my 'Arry is a devious one, isn't he? Fleur's laughter turned into a very content smile.

X O X O X O X

The appearance of Molly's only living son was a brutal reminder of what she had lost. The entire Burrow heard Molly wailing over the death of her family as she and Charlie mourned together in a back room until Charlie thought to cast an Imperturbable Charm, cutting off the sound.

The others spent time collecting and organizing memories for the Pensieve. Fleur and Harry both begged off revisiting the scenes of two nights ago, but Harry wasn't so lucky concerning the events of his Second Year.

Once the memories had been extracted, Fleur and Harry, along with Remus, Sirius, Tonks, Shacklebolt, and Charlie, who had just reappeared from the back room, all entered the Pensieve.

~ . ~ . ~

Fleur looked around. "Where are we?"

"We're in a tunnel that starts in a bathroom on the second floor. We're pretty much at the other end of it now."

"Which bathroom?" Sirius asked from behind them.

"Moaning Myrtle's," he answered.

"Moaning Myrtle?" Tonks laughed. "What were you even doing in a girls—"

The memory of Harry hissed, opening the Chamber of Secrets.

"You're a Parseltongue?" Tonks asked, surprised.

"Yeah, I found that out this year as well, at least what it was called."

They followed the memory of Harry into the chamber. Fleur choked up when she saw little Ginny Weasley lying face down at the feet of a massive statue. Twelve-year-old Harry ran to her.

"Ginny – don't be dead – please don't be dead!"

Fleur reached for Harry's hand and held it, interlacing her fingers with his as he squeezed her hand and bit down on his lip.

It was easy to see how difficult it was for Harry to watch this memory.

Everyone listened carefully as the future Voldemort began to speak. Gasps were heard when they learned his real name was Tom

Marvolo Riddle and he was a half-blood. Fleur heard Sirius explaining that Marvolo was a family name of the Gaunts.

Fleur's eyes filled with tears of joy when she heard the phoenix song in the chamber, but her heart filled with fear when she heard Riddle's speech concerning how Harry and he were just alike – not that she was worried Voldemort was right; Fleur could see the difference between the two of them even in the memory. Rather, it was as if Harry stood as a counterbalance to Riddle; one that was created the night Voldemort targeted the Potters. Yet a counterbalance, while being different, also must be equal. Just how much more 'equal' would Harry have to become in order to kill this Dark Lord?

Coupled with the Dumbledore's and Molly's worries, along with the things she'd seen herself concerning his dreams and scars, the question made Fleur go pale.

Harry caught her eye and smiled. "Hey, I promise, I win this in the end."

I hope you do, 'Arry, she answered silently, knowing that he wasn't answering her worries, but hoping all the same.

There was an uproar in the Pensieve when the basilisk made its appearance.

"That bloody thing has to be sixty feet long," Charlie cried, taking a couple unnecessary steps back.

They watched in horror as a young and wandless Harry closed his eyes and tried to run, tripping before Salazar Slytherin's pet monster struck where his head had just been. No one blamed the memory of Harry for putting on the Sorting Hat and pulling it down over his eyes.

A few seconds later, Sirius mumbled, "I'll be damned," as the twelve year old pulled out the Sword of Gryffindor.

Disbelief was evident in every adult face as they saw the younger Harry, now armed, turn to face the blinded pet. The disbelief turned to pride as he thrust the blade deep into the roof of the basilisk's mouth, blood flooding over Harry's upper body.



But Fleur shuddered when she saw the overgrown snake return the favor, driving a fang deep into the twelve year old boy's arm, flooding his body with poison. As the memory of Harry slid down the wall to lie dying on the floor, she turned away and buried her head in Harry's chest.

He put his arms around her and whispered with amusement, "It's okay, you don't even have to fix me up this time."

Fleur wanted to cry, hit him, and kiss him all at the same time. To joke about a thing like this! How does he—

The piercing scream of the diary made her jump. Harry caught her in mid-air, holding her tightly against his body. She wrapped her arms around him and whispered into his ear. "As zhe English say, 'Always zhe bloody 'ero,' aren't you?"

Harry smiled as he let her down. Fleur slipped a hand around him and he did the same. They walked out of the chamber arm and arm, following the memory of Harry. Fleur was struck by how tender the younger Harry was with Ginny, reassuring her as they walked through the gloomy tunnel.

The irony wasn't lost on Fleur as she followed the Ginny and the young hero – the same hero that later saved the French Witch's life. She was deep in thought as her feet hit the ground in the Burrow. It was no wonder Ginny's devotion to Harry had grown, no wonder a witch so young could write letters to him with so much passion and conviction, and no wonder how a witch her age could stand shoulder to shoulder with others against the onslaught of death.

And I must be willing to do the same, even if 'Arry won't like it. I'll tell them tonight, after the meeting.

X O X O X O X

Harry's owl showed up a little later in the day.

"Hedwig!" Harry chirped in surprise as the owl landed and nipped at him. "I've missed you too, girl."

Harry fed his owl and looked it over for any signs of distress. Hedwig nipped affectionately at his fingers and ears, staying close to him.

Harry introduced the owl to Fleur and she gave it a few extra treats while fawning over it until Hedwig included her in the affectionate nipping.

Since it was time to eat, Fleur took the owl outside to let it hunt for a more satisfying dinner. But the owl didn't fly off right away. Instead, it landed on the table and waited for Fleur, seemingly anticipating that she wanted to say something.

"You're a smart owl, aren't you?" Fleur cooed.

She would've sworn the single hoot was an answer and thought for a second before asking her next question.

"You know I'm part Veela, don't you?" she asked, beginning to understand why the owl had taken to her as well as it had.\*

The owl hooted again, then stared towards the house, back to Fleur, back to the house, and back to Fleur again.

"Oui," she answered, figuring the owl wanted to know if she really cared for Harry. The soft hooting and pecking at her fingers confirmed it for her.

"Now listen," Fleur said after a few seconds. "'Arry and I might 'ave to escape to France if something 'appens. If we do, will you be able to find us?"

The owl turned to the East and gave a loud hoot. Fleur laughed.

"Sorry, I had to ask. Not very many owls are as smart as you. 'Arry is very lucky to 'ave you."

The owl gave another soft hoot and nipped her on the finger again.

"I like you too, 'Edwig. Now go off and 'unt." She thought about sending the owl to her parents with a note, but there was too much to say. She decided it would be better to Portkey home for an afternoon instead.

Maybe she could get Harry to go with her and they could stay a bit longer. . . even be uninterrupted long enough for her to kiss him like a Veela should. . . like a witch should.

Why not both?

Fleur giggled, and realized she'd done that more in the last day than she had in the last five years combined.

X O X O X O X

Professor McGonagall came through the back door in the early evening. Seeing Harry, she buried him in a hug worthy of Mrs. Weasley then stepped back and wiped away a few tears, righted herself, and became the "Professor McGonagall" that Harry knew. After that, the Burrow quickly filled up and Harry found himself sitting on the floor in the corner of the sitting room with Neville, Susan, Cho, Su Li, and of course, Fleur, who was sitting on a small footstool behind him. Harry was leaning back against Fleur's legs as she rested her chin on his head, her arms were draped over the front of him and across his chest.

"It's good to know you take advice so well," Susan teased Harry.

"And work so fast," Cho added.

"Well, a little provocation 'elped," purred a content part Veela.

As if on command, Harry turned red once more, thinking at the same time that he had to stop blushing at every little tease she directed at him.

A voice Harry wasn't as familiar with chimed out, "It's about time he got a witch."

They all turned to Su Li, a petite, cute little Fourth Year that Harry hadn't said much more than 'hi' to in all his time at Hogwarts.

"What?" she asked. "Do you know what it's like having to listen to witches pine away for him?"

"Yes!" Susan and Cho answered rather quickly.

Neville broke out in laughter and leaned over to Harry. "Bet you wished you knew about this a couple years ago, eh? Should've settled for the average looking squib role like me."

Susan cleared her throat. "Not according to a couple witches in Hufflepuff, or the Ravenclaw witch your lips seem permanently attached to in the last couple days." She shot a playful look at Su Li.

"What?" she answered. "I'm was just impressed with the way he handles his wand."

A moment of silence followed her comment before she realized what she had said. "NO! Not like that. I meant the one he just learned how to really use a couple days ago!"

"When you stayed with him all night?" Cho asked.

"Yeah."

Guffaws rang out.

"NO! You perverts! When we spent the night– oh forget it!"

Harry, who'd been watching the whole thing, raised an eyebrow to Neville.

Though embarrassed, Neville shrugged and leaned over to Su Li.

"Um, thanks for defending my honor, but next time, maybe we should leave it undefended."

She swatted him on the shoulder and pushed him away, only to latch on and pull him right back, leaning her head against him.

Harry felt Fleur tightening her arms around him as well and he looked up to find her practically glowing. At least one thing seems to have turned out okay in my world. He looked back over at Neville. Alright, two things. Though out of the corner of his eye, he couldn't help but notice the flash of grief Cho was trying to hide. It was hard to watch, harder still since the grief was caused by Cedric saving his life.

Harry was rattled from his thoughts by Sirius calling the meeting to order and introducing Professor Moody (even though he didn't teach Harry, the title stuck with him in Harry's mind).

"We need to get some particulars out of the way," Professor Moody began. "First, a reminder; we have all made wizarding oaths to the Order. I remind you that what is said in this room will not be spoken outside this group. To do so will cause severe pain and death. That was part of the vow each of you voluntarily took. The only ones not under that vow are the six teenagers sitting in the corner and they have attacked or killed Death Eaters already. That means every one of them are targeted for death and not a risk, especially Potter. Even so, they will not sit through the entire meeting.

"Second, this is not the same war that was fought a decade and a half ago. That war was a slow, methodical advance against our society. This war follows the Muggle Nazi doctrine of Blitzkrieg, or 'Lightning war'. Voldemort; THAT'S RIGHT I SAID VOLDEMORT" – Moody thundered when half the gathering flinched at the name – "has been heavily recruiting for some time right under the nose of the Ministry. Last night, we received word that he has close to a thousand Death Eaters at his command."

Dismay ran through the Order. "How sure are we of the information and the source?" someone asked.

"Very. Those of you who were part of the first Order remember that Severus Snape spied for us towards the end of that war. After the slaughter at Hogwarts, he was able to slip back in with the Death Eaters and Apparate with them to their master. He got a firsthand account last night of their numbers and also told us that Voldemort – IT'S ONLY A DAMN NAME PEOPLE – was planning on moving fast. He found Minerva and informed her this morning, but none of us expected VOLDEMORT" – his magical eye spun in its socket, taking in the entire room and challenging someone to flinch at the name – "to move as fast as he has."

"How did he get so many followers?" a witch asked.

"I said he was heavily recruiting, didn't I?" Moody sniped. He didn't like repeating himself.

Shacklebolt cleared his throat. "Before the ministry fell this afternoon, we had received reports of prison breaks."

"Azkaban?" Charlie inquired.

"I said breaks, plural. Not just Azkaban, but also wizarding prisons of South Africa, India, the US, Australia, Russia, Zambia, and Yemen, and probably other we don't know about. Next you're going to be asking how we found out about all of them. . . we were notified."

"What? Why were you notified of a prison break in Zambia or China?" Sirius asked.

"Same reason Panama notified us when they almost caught you," Shacklebolt answered.

"Oh, Merlin's nutsack." Sirius turned whiter than any ghost at Hogwarts that Harry could remember.

"Don't tell me," Remus whispered.

"Yeah," Sirius said, then looked at everyone else. "I'm a subject of the British crown under the magical government, as is everyone else born here."

"So?" someone asked, but Harry could tell more and more people were beginning to understand.

Shacklebolt clarified the problem. "We get a report every time a magical subject of the Crown is arrested, released, or breaks out of prison in a foreign country. We crosschecked the names this morning and of the seven prisons outside the UK where we know a break happened, all seven had at least four British magical subjects that were imprisoned six to nine months ago. Anyone care to guess what mark every one of them had on their forearm?"

"All of them?" A witch that looked like an older version of the Holyhead Harpies's captain asked.

"Every one of them. From what we can tell, they were all mid-level Death Eaters in the last war. Every prison reports the majority of those that escaped, had become loyal to them."

Charlie was incensed. "You're telling me that Death Eaters went recruiting in the largest and most dangerous wizarding prisons in the world?"

"That's exactly what I'm telling you," Shacklebolt answered. "And worse, they were highly successful. The last count puts the total breakout at close to three hundred people. Including those that escaped from Azkaban, that makes up almost half the total count Severus gave us, all with time in prison, and most of those for serious crimes against Muggles or Muggleborns."

"Damn," Sirius said for the now silent Order. "We're going to have to be very careful. Speaking of which, as much as I loathe Snivellus, you were wrong to reveal his work for the Order, Alastor. The Moody I knew in the last—"

It was Harry and Neville's disarming spells that hit Moody first, followed almost instantly by three more from the other teenagers who sat a year under a fake Professor Moody's teachings. Moody took the spells in the chest, flipping him over a chair and into a wall where he fell into a heap as his wand landed at Harry and Neville's feet.

Shacklebolt stepped between Moody and the teenagers.

"CEASE YOUR HEXING!" He commanded. "This is the real Moody. He shared the name and actions of Severus Snape with you because Severus was killed this morning."

More murmurs ran through the gathered group, but Professor Moody, who had pulled himself back up to lean against the wall, put his hand up and stopped it. "If you don't believe Shacklebolt, watch the memories in the Pensieve on the attack of Diagon Alley. Someone had a wand on Potter. Snape noticed and killed him, only to be cut down by other Death Eaters that saw what he had done."

"How do you know it was Severus?" Professor McGonagall asked.

Moody came around the chair and sat down. His magical eye whizzed around the room once before settling on Harry and Neville. "No one can cast the Killing Curse silently. I recognized his voice."

"We need to move on," Shacklebolt instructed the Order. "Enough talk of the battle this afternoon, or we'll never get through the meeting."

"I agree," Moody said as he stood up again to finish his speech.

"Third, CONSTANT VIGILANCE!" he bellowed as people jumped. Harry and the others chuckled. They figured the real Professor Moody would have done much the same as the fake. Harry could see Tonks laughing on the other side of the room as well.

"Before you leave here tonight," The retired Auror continued, "congratulate those two young wizards over there for beating me to the wand. As soon as something didn't look right, they disarmed me. This war is not about friends, people. It was a friend that made Potter an orphan and put Longbottom's parents in St. Mungo's, permanently mad!"

Harry had to fight with every last fiber of his being to not curse the ex-Auror again. It was only the arms of Fleur and her whispering in his ear that stopped him. A quick glance at Neville showed Su Li doing much the same for him.

"You may think that is harsh on those two young wizards," Moody nodded to them, "but every person here must understand the reality of what happened. Always keep your wand at your ready. There is only one way to be alive at the end of the war.

"CONSTANT VIGILANCE!"

X O X O X O X

A little while later, the six teenagers headed upstairs to Ginny's bedroom, but Cho and Susan kicked out Neville and Harry "to talk with their witches, alone," as they put it.

Said wizards were worried.

"What do you think. . . ?" Neville trailed off, casting a worried look at the door they'd just been ushered out of.

"I have no idea," Harry answered. "Sirius told me that he thinks even Dumbledore isn't smart enough to understand witches."

Neville grunted in agreement.



"So, you and Su Li?" Harry asked as they sat down on the landing, half a flight up from the bedroom. They could hear the witches giggling and laughing.

"Yeah, I guess so. A lot has changed in the last forty-eight hours. Can you imagine that I'm able to do magic without blowing anything up?"

Harry shot him a quirked smile. "Can you imagine people actually believe me about something?"

They eyed each other for a second before howling with laughter.

"I'm not sure what's funnier – that, or the fact that there are four witches in that room talking about the two of us," Neville said when he caught his breath.

Harry, who was still laughing, sobered quickly. "There's nothing funny about that. It's downright scary is what it is."

"I think you're right," Neville said after a moment of pondering. "I'm not sure what's worse, teenage witches or the Death Eaters."

A moment later they both quipped, "Teenage witches," and laughed again.

Finally, Neville had to ask, "You and Fleur? How did. . . ?"

"We're not, officially – though we are, kind of, if that makes any sense?"

"No, but once again we're talking about witches, so that's probably the best we're going to get."

Harry grinned, finding it oddly comforting talking with Neville.

Laughter broke out from the bedroom again. "It's good to hear them laughing," Neville said quietly. "Most of the last two days have been filled with mourning."

Harry thought about that for a second. "What about you?"

"Me? I guess I'm used to it in some way. It's different, but this isn't my first loss." He looked Harry dead in the eye. "You know what I mean. The whole damn house knows what I mean thanks to Moody."

"Yeah," Harry said, lost in his thoughts again. He couldn't get over the change in Neville. It wasn't that his entire personality had changed, but there was a fundamental difference in him that Harry couldn't put his finger on.

Neville seemed to come to the same conclusion about Harry. "You've changed, mate."

"I was thinking the same thing about you. What happened?"

"Those damn Death Eaters attacked, that's what happened."

Harry saw a wave of emotion overtake Neville and when he began speaking again, there was a deep sense of pain and an ocean of anger.

"When the Death Eaters came, one of them cast a dark cutting curse into the stands for no damn reason at all. I knew where it was headed and I knew what to do, but I couldn't get my magic to work. I tried, Merlin, I tried, but I couldn't cast the charm because I was too weak and that damn curse hit a cute little Second Year, tore right through her body. I held her in my arms Harry. I held her in my arms as she died because I was an effing squib that couldn't produce a simple, bloody Shield charm. . . ."

Harry sat silently as Neville fought through another rush of emotions.

He looked up, tears brimming. "I held her. I kept apologizing over and over for not being able to save her, not being good enough to protect her. I held her as she bled out in my arms. She was scared, confused. . . I'll never forget her eyes when she died, they just went blank. I still see them in my dreams."

"I'm sorry, Neville." Harry didn't know what else to say.

"Then I heard her voice," Neville spat out.

"Her voice?" Harry repeated.

"Yeah, the same voice that I hear whenever Dementors are too close, just before I hear my parents. It's the only time I've ever heard them talk."

Harry leaned back against the wall, thinking hard. He and Neville were the same age. If Neville had never heard them talk, that meant. . . "When did it happen?" he finally asked.

"November first, 1981."

"The day after. . . ." Harry was taken aback by how intertwined his and Neville's lives actually were.

"Bloody convenient coincidence isn't it?" Neville asked. "Makes you wonder just what happened the week our parents were destroyed."

Harry rolled his wand in his fingers, thinking about the screams he heard every time the guards of Azkaban got too close. He felt oddly comforted now, knowing that someone else knew his hell.

Neville leaned back. "Last year, when the Dementors came near, I could hear my parents being tortured. I heard Bellatrix Lestrange cackle with laughter while crying out "Crucio". That's why I just about went around the twist in class the day we were shown the Unforgivables.

"The night before last, While I was watching that little girl die, I heard her. I heard the bitch that destroy my parents and I wanted revenge. I wanted blood. Everything just exploded inside of me. All the magic that I had somehow dammed up, came out. I got so mad all I could think about was killing. I cast so many curses my wand began to glow and I cast curses through shield charms. I even killed a Death Eater with a Body-bind Jinx. That's not supposed to happen, Harry. There's no way that I should be able to do that."

Harry blew out a gust of air. "How?"

"I asked Madame Bones and Professor McGonagall the same thing. They think that I pushed so much anger and pain into my magic that it broke whatever was holding it back all these years. It all came rushing out that night and that's what made my spells so overly

powerful. They think that the Body-bind jinx literally bound his heart, keeping it from beating."

Harry sat wide-eyed.

"And you know something else? I'm ashamed to admit this to them" – he gestured to the witches in the room below them – "but there was a part of me that liked it. When my magic began to pour out, a part of me felt a vengeance and wanted to kill more of them. I didn't want to stop. I wanted to kill until every last one of them was dead."

"I know exactly what you mean," Harry whispered.

Neville wiped the remaining moisture away from his eyes. "Have you ever heard of the Muggle term, Bloodlust?"

"I've heard of it, but never really knew what it meant."

"I read a Muggle book a couple years ago that had the term in it and looked it up. It's an 'insatiable desire to shed blood.' Interesting that I remembered that after one read, but I can't remember anything else, isn't it? Anyway, that's what I think I had that night and it's beginning to scare me. Why would I have it? Why would I enjoy killing them so much?"

"I don't know."

"Have you ever had it?"

"I. . ." Harry stopped and decided that of anyone, anywhere in the world that could understand what he was going through, it'd be Neville. After what Harry had found out over the last couple of days, he was starting to see much of his story in Neville, and also beginning to see in him a kindred spirit – that spirit might very well be Ankou, the Breton mythological personification of death himself, but a kindred spirit nonetheless.

"Yeah, I have," Harry confessed. "When we left the graveyard and went back to Hogwarts, Death Eaters ambushed Fleur and Krum. I was on my broom—"

"That figures," Neville interrupted with a snort, "best place for you to be, probably pretty effective, too."

Harry gave him a small grin. "I made one pass and hit the Death Eaters with a couple curses, but before I could come around for a second one, I saw Krum being hit with the Killing Curse."

Neville nodded. "There were a lot of those that night."

"Yeah, well, then I did it. Twice, killing two Death Eaters. After that, I landed, cast the biggest Serpentina charm you would have ever seen and told the snake to go kill more of them. Today, I threw a cutter spell I learned about the other day and literally sliced a wand in half as the Death Eater tried to block it."

Neville cocked an eyebrow. "And you were surprised by my Body-bind jinx?"

"Yeah, well, I summoned four more snakes and sent them off to kill the Death Eaters, didn't even care. I wanted them to die. I wanted to stay in the alley and cause them pain. I wanted to see the alley filled with black robes and blood. I got so mad when Remus grabbed my arm and Apparated that I wanted to stun him as well."

"We were at Madame Bones's office today when it happened," Neville said after Harry took a couple breaths to calm himself.

"Tonks told us when we were in Diagon alley. I thought you were all dead."

"We thought the same about you, figuring they were going to hit Diagon Alley as soon as the Ministry fell. I think that's why those two Aurors went back after you."

"They arrived about five seconds before the Death Eaters. Remus asked about Madame Bones and Tonks told him all of you were with her and she didn't know if you had made it out. What happened?"

"We were in Susan's aunt's office. I came out and saw bodies of Hit Wizards and Aurors I had just been talking with, flipped right out my cauldron and went off to kill something – didn't even consider them human after that. I started cutting down anything that wore a black robe and mask. What's wrong with me? That's not how a fourteen year old is supposed to act, is it?"

Harry smirked. "Are you seriously asking me if it is normal for an underage wizard to take stupidly big risks by rushing off into situations he knows little-to-nothing about and start cursing things on a whim?"

"I guess you have a point there," Neville conceded. They both laughed, breaking the tension of the moment.

Harry suddenly felt the need to confess something, even though part of his rational mind questioned why he was beginning to act so out of character by being open and honest about such things. He didn't know whether it was because of what was happening with Fleur, or because he and Neville did have so much in common. Maybe it was just everything that had happened over the last few days, but Harry felt like he had to tell Neville.

"I don't know if I'm going to live through this, I don't know if I want to."

Neville was gazing down the stairwell. "I know. I've been thinking about the same thing. I'll tell you this, though, there is no way in hell I am going to end up like my parents. I'm finished Harry. Lovable but bugged Neville is gone. I'll Crucio every black robed bastard between here and Diagon Alley before I end up like them."

"Yeah. I know exactly what you mean. But what happens if we end up like Voldemort instead?"

Neville slowly raised his eyes, set his jaw firmly, and pushed his shoulders back before facing Harry. "If I end up like Voldemort, then you'll kill me. If you end up like him, then I'll kill you. It's what friends do."

Harry thought about it for a second and nodded, realizing he had just promised to possibly kill the last remaining Gryffindor that he called a friend.

They sat in silence until the meeting below came to a close a few minutes later.

Descending the stairs, Harry knocked on the door of the room they had earlier been banished from. The four girls poured out, pink cheeked and giggly. Even Fleur, who always carried herself in a

demure manner, had the look of a flibbertigibbet; it made Harry laugh and that was saying something considering the conversation he just had.

Downstairs, Madame Bones addressed the students. "As you know, Minister Fudge was killed in the attack at the Tri-wizard tournament, which made me the emergency Minister of Magic over the last legitimate government of Wizarding Britain. As such, I am instructing you to not take part in this war until you're of age, except in self-defense, and only if there is no other escape."

Harry and Neville looked at each other, took a deep breath each, and opened their mouths to argue.

"However," she said, holding her hand up to cut off their protests before they even started, "since it looks like I have two hard-headed, consequences-be-damned Gryffindors here, as well as a few witches that are too stubborn for their own good – yes, Susan, I am including you – you should note that my last act before the Ministry fell was cancelling the traces on all children over the age of twelve. The last thing I want is Death Eaters using the trace to find or track a family. But that does not mean that any of you have a license to put yourselves in danger, do you understand me boys?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Ladies?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Ms. Delacour. I am sorry to say I was not able to get into contact with your father through the French ministry. I am sure your family is very worried about you. Did you take care of that thing we talked about?"

"Yes, ma'am. I 'ave it with me at all times."

"Good. Remember my warning."

"I will, but since I am of age and 'ave seen what zhesse bâtards 'ave done, I would like to join zhe Order."

"NO!" Harry shouted.

Fleur put a hand on his cheek and looked into his eyes, but continued talking to Madame Bones. "Zhis way, I can know what is 'appening and make plans for 'Arry and I to be safe until zhe time comes. I take it you 'ave all been told zhat it's been prophesied 'Arry will be a part of zhe war?"

Harry knew they had to tell the Order something concerning the prophecy and Fleur's way of putting it made sense, but he did not want her to be a part of the Order. It was his job to protect her. Not the other way around.

"Good, zhen I can be a go-between zhat keeps 'Arry one step away, but close enough to know what is 'appening. I will take zhe vow zo zhere is no doubt about my loyalty."

"I said 'NO!' dammit!" Harry yelled again.

"Zhat is not for you to decide, 'Arry. We must all do our part. You 'ave yours, would you deny me mine?"

Harry glared at her, wanting to scream to the heavens that it was exactly what he wanted to deny her, but he knew it wouldn't work, so instead he settled for being brassed-off something terrible.

The younger witches were all smirking, though Harry had no idea why. Neville, he could see, was just as incensed, like Harry thought a true Gryffindor should be, but since it wasn't his fight, he kept out of it.

"Good to see you're keeping our Gryffindors chivalrous, Minerva," Charlie interjected from the side of the room.

"Yeah, but chivalry only gets you so far, or don't you remember?" Tonks cut in, to his embarrassment. Others laughed politely at Tonks's awkward attempt to break the tension.

Twenty minutes later everyone had gone home, though Tonks stayed to help clean up.

As soon as possible, Harry trounced upstairs and went to bed. The door opened a short time later.



"Arry? Can we talk?"

Harry rolled over to face her, but didn't say a word. He couldn't. She looked so beautiful, standing in the moonlight that illuminated the room through the windows, but it was the vulnerability that shone in her face and her body language that made him want to get on his knees and beg forgiveness for yelling at her earlier.

He decided he couldn't do it.

"Are you mad at me, 'Arry?"

"No," he said too fast, cringing and waiting for the 'don't lie to me' mantra he knew to be coming.

It did, but a lot softer than he expected. "I know you're lying, 'Arry, you're not very good at it."

"Then why ask?" Harry regretted it as soon as the words escaped his lips. He heard Fleur suck in a sharp gasp of air just before he clarified. "I didn't mean it like that."

Fleur sat on the edge of his bed. "I would be lying if I said I was not upset with you," she began. "But I am zhankful zhat you want to protect me. I know zhat is why you are mad zhat I 'ave joined zhe Order. Zhe young witches were very informative about you."

Harry couldn't stop the hint of fear that surfaced.

Fleur laughed. "You are such a puzzle. You 'ave faced so much, but fear giggling teenage witches. So many zhings 'ave 'appened to you, but your 'eart is still so beautiful. Please don't ever change zhat. It is one of your most charmantes qualités."

"English?" Harry asked.

"Just like it sounds, it's one of your most charming qualities."

"Oh. Well, since we're on charming qualities," Harry said in a false sweetness. "One of your most charming qualities is that you're breathing, don't every change that – oh, wait; you started to by joining the Order, didn't you? Never mind."

He missed Fleur's stunned look or the tears he caused when he rolled over and faced the wall, unable to cope with his own fears and emotions that were welling up inside. He had no words to describe what he was feeling, no ability to even process it. This wasn't about what happened at Hogwarts. It wasn't even about what happened at the grave yard. This was about what was happening in his own soul – in his own heart, and what could happen to someone else who happened to find her way into it.

X O X O X O X

Harry woke up to the sound of a loud ping, a second one brought him upright in bed.

What is that?

He reached over to the nightstand and put on his glasses, looking over to see Fleur sleeping peacefully in the other bed. He could feel her magic pushing images into his mind, though from this distance it was much weaker. It surprised Harry that it didn't feel like a violation of his person. Instead, it felt intimate, like she was opening a precious part of herself to him, and only him.

Harry closed his eyes and wondered again why she cared so much. Could Sirius have been right? He smiled as he thought about their almost kiss and holding her hand in the Pensieve, not to mention how they were sitting during the meeting with her arms draped over him.

Then she had to join the Order.

He walked over to the window on the other side of the room and looked out, trying to figure out what woke him up.

PING!

He saw movement just beyond the Burrow's outer Protective Charms.

"Damn it," he breathed. The next moment it sounded like a hailstorm on a tin roof.

Death Eaters had misjudged and Apparated into the Protective Charms, bouncing off them and landing in the back field.

They had finally come.

"Fleur! Wake up!"

She stirred and turned over in her bed. "'Arry? Etes-vous d'avoir de mauvais rêves encore?"

"English, Fleur," he snapped.

She mistook the urgency in his voice for anger and sat up, confused. "Why are you waking me up in zhe middle of zhe night to yell at me?"

Harry ignored the question. With a wave of his wand and a vanishing charm, his nightclothes were gone.

"'Arry, what are you doing?"

"Keeping you breathing," he answered a little vindictively, driven by the fear of what might happen if she didn't get out beyond the Protective Charms and Apparate to France.

Another series of pings rang in the room.

"What was zhat?" she asked, looking up at the ceiling.

"Death Eaters. About forty of them now. They began Apparating in about a minute ago. Get up and get dressed, make sure you have your Portkey with you.

Fleur jumped out of bed. "I'm going to my room to change and get my zhings. Is your trunk ready?"

"For what?" Harry asked, confused.

"To Portkey with me to France!"

"I'm not going."

Fleur opened her mouth to argue, but it was drowned out by more Death Eaters Apparating in and bouncing off the Charms.

"Ow long can zhe protections 'old?"

"I don't know, their oldest son was curse-breaker, so their charms are probably decent, but I don't want to push it. Go, get dressed."

Fleur grabbed her wand, ran out of the room and down the stairs, putting off the argument she was about to have with Harry until more adults were around.

Back in the room, Harry got dressed, slipped his bag of gold and his books into his robe (and sealed it) just in case they were forced from the Burrow, and ran out the door. He headed down the flight of stairs to the next floor, barging into Sirius's room.

"Wake up!"

"Harry? What's wrong?"

"The Death Eaters have come, they're just outside the Protective Charms."

Sirius jumped out of bed already dressed and grabbed his wand. He and Harry ran down two more flights of stairs to Fleur's room and without thinking, crashed through the door.

"Harry, take Fleur on your broom to clear the wards, then land somewhere safe."

Sirius turned to Fleur. "As soon as he gets clear, both of you use that Portkey, got it?"

"Oui."

"Sirius, I'm not running." Harry argued. "I'm staying with you."

"No you're not! You're going with Fleur and figuring out your next steps in France, do you understand? That means figure it out, not doing something stupid like your father and I would have done. You are smarter and better than us Harry. Good luck."

He gave Harry a quick squeeze, then released him and turning to Fleur, enveloped her in a tight hug to whisper in her ear.

"Get my godson out of Britain and if I don't see you again, take care of him, please." Before she could say anything, Sirius ran out of the room and down the stairs.

Harry looked out of the window to see five dark figures running out of the house, one of them morphing into a very small, slender little girl with very little area to target. He started towards the door to follow them to the battle, but Fleur stepped in front of him.

"If you stay, zhen I stay."

"NO! You heard Madame Bones. They'll. . ." he couldn't even bring himself to say it.

"Zhen you are coming with me."

Harry fumed, but there wasn't anything else he could do except grit his teeth in anger for not being with his godfather. Quickly, he summoned his broom and motioned Fleur behind him. When it reached him, they both stepped over it and she put her arms around his waist, holding on tight. In the waning moments before they flew out of the window, she couldn't help but look over at the letters sitting on the nightstand and wonder how often Ginny had wanted to sit on a broom like this with Harry.

A moment later, they were in the air. Harry immediately dove for speed, then pulled out, lancing across the backyard while slowly climbing higher to give him better vision of what was happening. Fleur already had her wand out, spells slicing through the air. Harry had his wand in-hand as well, casting spells left and right. He heard yelling in the distance and turned the broom that way, diving for more speed and streaking across the ground as fast as he could push the broom. He didn't slow down when he hit the tree line where the smaller of the two battles was taking place. He yanked the broom left, then right, up over a branch and right gain, then left, only to come too close to a tree trunk. He yanked the broom to the right and held on tight as he felt a bump, then pulling up over a branch and dove below another. Fleur's head was buried in his back, not wanting to watch.

Harry veered the broom to the right and flew towards the battle, casting three curses and hoping the Body-binds would hold - maybe he would get lucky enough to kill one of them like Neville did.

Harry and Fleur broke out of the tree line and raced through the field, coming upon a staggered line holding off too many Death Eaters. But a bright green flash flared in front of him.

To his horror, Mrs. Weasley froze in mid-curse, then fell to the ground, unmoving as she joined her family in the ethereal existence.

Harry screamed in rage and raised his wand to collect the newly incurred blood debt, but before he could kill the Death Eater, Fleur leaned into him even more and whispered, "Take me 'ome, 'Arry. We'll regroup and come back a 'undred times ztonger, just like your godfather wants. Take me 'ome so we can plan our revenge."

Somehow her voice broke through Harry's wrath. He wrenched up on his broom and shot out into the night.

Fleur continued to lean into him, crying over the death of Molly and heartbroken at the loss that her hero, her amour had to endure in his life.

X O X O X O X

A minute later, they set down on the same hill that Harry and the others had Portkeyed from to the World Cup the previous summer.

Fleur took out the Portkey and gave it to him to hold on to. "Okay 'Arry, I will activate it and we will 'ave five seconds.

She touched it with her wand and they watched as it began to glow. She took hold of it as well, standing inches away from him and stared into his eyes.

At the count of three, she noticed they became distant, as if he had just resolved himself about something.

She was right. At the count of one, Harry let go of the Portkey.

"QUE? NON!" yelled Fleur and launched herself at him, wrapping her legs and an arm around his body. With the other hand, she pressed the Portkey tightly against his bare skin.

Fleur felt the yank just behind her belly button and held on tightly to Harry. Ten seconds later, they tumbled to the ground in France.

A very large, peaceful home spread out before them a few hundred feet away.

Harry got up and faced Fleur. She could see anger smoldering in the same eyes that were so distant just a few seconds ago, but before Harry could get a word out, she slapped him across the face.

"Never do zat to me again! 'Ow dare you!"

Fleur turned on her heel and walked off into the sunrise just breaking over the horizon. At the top of the little knoll where the home sat, she turned back to see that Harry hadn't moved, except to stare into the west and the darkness of night.

She turned around and walked back down the knoll. "Come, it's been a hard morning already and zhe sun 'as just risen.

Harry remained silent.

Fleur came closer and softened her voice even more. "You scared me when you let go of zhe Portkey, 'Arry. Let's get to the 'ouse. We can relax and talk in zhere."

"Talk," Harry said. "Something I'll never hear her do again."

Fleur stopped dead in her tracks. She'd heard that voice once before, two days ago as Harry kneeled beside his Headmaster and watched him die.

Silently, she took his hand and led him off to the top of the knoll and into the Delacour home, where she guided Harry to a room before waking up her parents. He was in no shape to meet them now, nor had he said anything else since landing in France.

Fleur came out of Harry's room and walked down the hall to the other end of the house, where she opened her parents' bedroom door.

"Gabrielle, are you okay?" her mother asked.

"No, Maman, it's me, Fleur."

Apolline Delacour threw her covers back and hurtled off the end of the bed.

"FLEUR! OH MY BABY FLEUR. YOU'RE ALIVE!"

"What?" Jacque Delacour asked sleepily.

"Your daughter is home!" she yelled.

He jumped out of bed and crushed both mother and daughter in a hug. Fleur, hugging them back, broke down in tears.

Her parents held her and let her cry, gently lowering her to the floor when she couldn't hold up her own body weight anymore. Jacque finally had to get his wand and cast a privacy charm so Fleur's wailing wouldn't wake up her sister, who was still going through her transformation.

He flashed a look over Fleur at his wife after a few minutes and they communicated silently.

"Ma Petite, are you hurt?" her mother asked.

Fleur held on tighter and cried harder, almost sending her parents into a frenzy.

"Do you need a Healer?" Papa asked this time.

She shook her head no.

After more crying than both parents combined had seen from her in the last five years, Fleur was able to calm down a little, though tears still leaked from the corners of her eyes.



"How did you get back to France?" Her father asked, figuring it would be a safe question.

"Portkey," she answered, then remembered who she came with and had blink a few times to be able to see again.

"Did you make it?" he continued "Not that I'm upset. It's just that if you did, I'll make the arrangements to pay the fine."

"I did, but don't worry Papa, it was legal."

He looked over her head at her mother again, not wanting to believe it, not wanting to acknowledge what he knew now to be true. Jacque Delacour knew the only way an international Portkey made by a non-government agency could be legal.

"Fleur, what are you telling me?"

"They're at war again, Papa." Fleur buried her face in her hands. "We were attacked in the middle of the night and had to leave. I had to force him to leave the only family he ever knew, force him to abandon them only to see his adopted maman killed before his eyes as we flew past on his broom."

"Him, killed?" both parents mouthed to the other.

"Oh my god Maman what am I going to do? He's going to hate me. I forced him to come to France. I didn't let him go back. . . and then, and then I slapped him! OH GOD what was I thinking!"

Fleur broke out in sobs again, safe at home. Then she remembered that 'home' was something Harry never really had and now, after Molly's death, whatever little amount of it he did have at the Burrow, he would never be able to have again.

So much loss for someone so young.

She sobbed even harder.

Her parents continued to hold her, but finally her mother had to ask, "Who is he? Who are you talking about and where is he now?"

"In the guest bedroom at the other end of the hall." Fleur choked out.

"That's the end of the hall your sister is in." her father reminded her.  
"Are you sure—"

Fleur gained a little more control of herself. "She won't mind, trust me Papa."

The parents looked at each other once more over Fleur's shoulders, confusion and frustration evident. Her father kneeled before her and gently pulled her hands from her face. It was a puffy, red mess by this point.

"Fleur," – he tried to keep his voice light and a little playful so what he asked didn't sound accusatory – "could you tell your mother and me who it is that your sister doesn't mind having in the bedroom just down the hall from her?"

"Her hero, 'Arry Potter."

"Oh, dear god in heaven."

END OF PART ONE

\*There was no way to include this in the text, so I wanted to put it here since it is important background to the story. It has now been shown that birds of different species will flock together and the dominant bird, will become the leader (within certain species of birds that have leaders) regardless of species. It is why I have Hedwig so quickly accepting Fleur, as well as recognizing that she's a Veela.

A/N1: Wow did the chapter ever grow. Like I said in the previous chapter, that one and this chapter were one chapter. Together, it stands at right around sixteen thousand words (without author's notes), just about double what any other chapter would have been.

Of course, that's not true either. As originally conceived, this fic was only twelve chapters long! We are at chapter eight and I'm only a quarter of the way through the story. The worst thing about it, I swore to my Beta PhoenixFanatic999 that this fic would be under 250K words. Well, I'm not so sure of that now, but let's not tell him that.

A/N2: Thanks again to everyone who has left a review. I would like to ask that since this is the end of Part One, if you haven't left a review yet, to please take a few seconds and tell me what you think – especially if you this story as an alert or favorite. I'd love to hear your comments (whoring for reviews? Guilty – hey, at least I admit it!)

#### SPEAKING OF REVIEWS:

Grimjowx: Did I ever laugh when I read the first line of your review. Matter of fact, I'm again now. Hopefully at this point, you know it was the fireplace from floo travel.

KoniK47: Thanks! Who knows, they'll come when they come! Hope you enjoyed this chapter as well.

ILikeComps: Sorry for the cliffy – that seems to be a running theme in the reviews for last chapter! I wonder why?

BabLe7: Hilarious star wars analogy. Oh lord, Mr. Murphy is Harry's best friend.

Vector: I guess you're another one I need to apologize to for the cliffy. Of course, they're so fun to write.

Jediprankster: Thanks, I've done so much editing and re-writing when it comes to the relationships – I really appreciate your words. I've also tried to build a bit into the backstory that they were growing closer than either of them would admit in the spring before the third task, but you're right. Things like this do make it happen fast.

Heliosion: Hopefully this chapter explained how why everything has happened so fast. I never liked the idea of Voldemort hiding out and slowly trying to take over. It just doesn't make sense to me. That's why a Blitzkreig method was used here, it just seems more his style. As for Harry falling into the Dark Arts, remember he has to have both impetus and a way to learn them – and just flipping a book open and reading about them is like learning karate from a book. If Ralph Machio can't do it, Harry Potter can't do it! (Sorry for the original Karate kid reference – guess I'm dating myself).

NyaaMe0w: Well, thank you then! I'm glad the intimacy is coming across in this.

Ed-hunter616: Yep, that's exactly right. It goes back to the "blitzkrieg" method of warfare.

hpnut1: Nice! Good guess. Your hopes were dead on right!

HPotter23: I'm humbled by your praise. Thank you very much.

Tinithor: Don't worry, it seems you weren't alone in hating THAT cliff hanger. I debated with the beta's about it and just felt like it'd be vile to do it... so I did. I guess I should take it as a compliment that you're complaining about the cliff hanger. Don't worry, there are probably only a couple big ones left in the story, even though it's just a quarter done.

A/N:

Mon Fille = My Little One

Mon Cochon = My Pig

Vulgaire = Wizarding french version of "Muggle"

I am representing the characters speaking in French, by having them speak without accents. However, "Harry" and "Hogwarts" will still continue to be 'Arry and 'Ogwarts, since they are proper names with the 'H' and the word is transliterated into French.

I have named Part 1, "The Crucible," just in case any of you are interested. I am also going to go back and rewrite the two scenes I've taking directly from JKR. It won't change anything in the story, but when I'm finished, I'll let you all know if you want to re-read those parts. I'm doing it mainly because, even though I've tagged it as JKR's work and not mine, I'm still uncomfortable with that much of her material directly in the fic.

OH YEAH - I OWN NONE OF THE CHARACTERS, MAKE NO MONEY FROM THIS, AND GAIN NOTHING BUT A SORE REAR-END FROM TOO MUCH SITTING WHILE I TYPE.

Also, \*\* Is a quote directly from JKR, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. (Ironical that you should read this after the last two notes, eh?)

Oh, and for those who were raving about longer chapters - here's over 12,000 words of actual story. Hope you like it!

Enjoy!

PART II

THE FORMING

CHAPTER NINE

THE FIRST DAY IN FRANCE

Harry woke up a little before noon and looked around at the strange, tranquil room, seeking familiarity in the haze between slumber and lucidity. He blinked two or three times before reaching over to the nightstand for his glasses. Sitting up, fractured memories of the rush

from the Burrow returned with a fury, led by the worst of them all: the form of Molly Weasley, fighting like a mother dragon protecting her eggs until she was lit up by the Killing Curse; the lifeless body of the closest person he ever had to a mother crumpling to the ground.

Harry remembered feeling as if a chasm had opened where his heart should have been, as he swore vengeance for another dead body that once was someone he cared for. Would it be the last, or would he have to do the same over the bodies of Sirius, Remus, and/or Charlie?

Why did Voldemort continue to do this to him? Why did those bints called The Three Fates always lay a path of safety for him while paving it with the blood and flesh of his friends and loved ones?

Or, as Harry put it, Why can't the bastard leave my friends alone and come after me?

He threw the covers back, slid out of bed, and walked into the attached bathroom, still ruminating on the night before. Fifteen minutes later, he was showered and dressed in clothes that someone had laid out for him sometime earlier that morning. To his surprise, the trousers were almost his size. The undershirt fit as well, but the shirt was much too big. He rolled the sleeves to the middle of his forearm and walked over to a mirror to see if they were even. Instead, Harry shook his head, finding humor in what he saw in his reflection.

Either his aunt had vastly overstated French fashion (and more than a few witches in Gryffindor as well), or the shirt was a jersey from some kind of French Muggle sports team that Fleur had laid out for him as joke – he guessed the latter. The jersey was blue with white shoulders. "France" was written in big red letters outlined in white from the right hip up across the sternum.

He look away from the mirror when something in the reflection caught his eye. In the corner of the room, next to the sliding glass doors that faced the back of the Delacour property, sat his broom. The shaft was littered with scorch marks, both in front and behind where he usually sat. The bristles were damaged and the stirrups were discolored.

How in the . . . ?

It must have happened when I flew over the fighting in the woods. It was the only time I was close enough.

Harry missed the fact that he used the singular pronoun. He closed his eyes and thought back to the previous night, how he had flown out of the window and shot across the yard to the tree line.

Now, looking at the broom, he saw the left stirrup was more than discolored. It was bent, flattened, and scraped up something terrible. He turned and went to the broom to inspect it more closely.

The tree! I did hit the tree. At least I was flying free-style and not using the stirrups. Had I been sitting just a few inches further back. . . .

Wait. . .

That's where. . .

FLEUR!

X O X O X O X

Fleur woke up just after noon and looked across the room to see if Harry was still there, only to find neither Harry nor his bed; but her confusion dissipated quickly as she looked around, noticing the familiar light brown walls and high ceiling of her bedroom.

It was all so familiar, yet somehow foreign at the same time; as if Fleur was looking at a memory of a past life. She was struck by how she used to take it all for granted. Now, it felt like a gift. Her bed was large enough to fit herself and two of her friends comfortably, plus Gabrielle when she was smaller. The mattress sat on a frame of dark cinnamon-stained oak, the head and footboards rounding off in five large elaborately carved swirls that peaked in the middle. In the corner to her right, an oval mirror stood, rising above the top of a six-foot tall wardrobe it was part of. Lying on her right side, Fleur could see through the floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors that opened to her small, private deck, which provided a view of the ocean in the distance, at the bottom of the valley that fell away from the house.

It was all so beautiful, so comforting, sitting in counterbalance to the recent fires of hell, yet she couldn't shake the feeling that those fires were still burning, not just on the other side of the La Manche, but in her, drawing her back into the maw of death they had just escaped. Was that why everything looked so clean, so soft, so exquisite on this side? Was everything really about balance and counterbalance? Was this really the counterbalance to that world? Was Harry really Voldemort's counterbalance? What then, was she? What did she counterbalance? Was she a splendor to behold – or a part of hell? If she counterbalanced Harry in a relationship, what did that say about her? About him?

Fleur sighed and got out of bed, willing away thoughts too deep to ponder after just waking up.

X O X O X O X

Still staring at his broom, the weight of Harry's actions struck him. The mammoth bedroom felt as though it was closing in on him as he came grips with his reckless actions and the witch he had risked. The blame was all his. He was the one that headed into the forest. He was the one that flew over the battle. He was the one that almost hurt Fleur by crashing into a tree. He was the one that put Fleur in danger of being hexed. No one else.

Harry slid the glass door open and escaped from the room, walking out onto the patio and down a path into the back gardens.

How could I have been so daft – a bloody brilliant thing to do to Fleur, wasn't it? Some git I've turned out to be. What a smashing good way to protect her, fly right into the battle! What was I thinking? Was I thinking? Probably not. It's just like before. I find two people who are finally willing to be my friends and what do I do?

Harry came up on a stone bench and sat down, overwhelmed.

Put them in danger. That's exactly what I did – Just like last time. It's the same thing I did to Hermione and Ron. I told Hermione to drink the potion when we were going after the Philosopher's Stone. What if she had been wrong?

He remembered watching her shudder as she finished drinking from the bottle. For a split second he was sure that she'd made a mistake.



She would have died. That's what would have happened and I told her to go first, letting her take the risk before I tried the other potion. Then there's the Third Year. She always looked out for me and what did I do? I got mad at her for telling Professor McGonagall about the broom Sirius bought.

Harry put his head in his hands. What kind of friend had he been?

What about Ron? Sure, he hurt Hermione's feelings that night the troll was set loose, but did I say anything to him? Not a damn thing. Did I go to help Hermione? Not one bit, not until we were both heading for the tower. Then what did I do? I told Ron to be the bait. I played it safe again and ran to Hermione as Ron got the troll to turn its back on her, trapping him instead. Smart move Harry, trade one friend for another.

The only reason I had to jump on the troll was because I sent Ron to a place he couldn't get out of. Guess it didn't matter to Ron though, break a bunch of rules and get a Dragon to safety? Ron's by my side. Quidditch? Ron's right there supporting me.

Harry put his hands over his eyes and cringed as he replayed Ron sacrificing himself in the real-to-life chess match.

And he stuck by me. Even when his sister was almost killed because they were associated with me.

He continued on, thinking about how so many accused him of being the Heir of Slytherin, but Ron stood steadfastly by his side . . . .

\*\*\*"You do believe me, don't you?"

"Course I do," Ron said quickly. "But — you must admit it's weird. . . ."

"I know it's weird," said Harry.

A grim smile crossed Harry's face as he remembered Ron fighting his fear of spiders that year. Sure, he hated them, but he was still there next to Harry, trying to overcome his terror.

Yet, the very next year what does he do? With a broken leg, Ron stands up and informs a wanted mass-murderer that he was going to have to kill him and Hermione to get to me. He even jumped on Sirius knowing that he couldn't protect himself with his leg like that.

Harry's head was still in his hands. After all that, I acted like such a child this year. I refused to see his side, refused to even talk with him after that night, refused to even admit that I may have overreacted, and then I waited until he came to me.

The one time he didn't believe me. If I had talked to him about my scar hurting, at least it would have given him more reason to accept that someone else put my name in the goblet. Then again, the day before the drawing, I even told him how I would have done it, or at least, when. It's no wonder he didn't believe me.

Harry leaned back and gazed through the valley into the distant Mediterranean Sea. After all of that, he was upset, but didn't yell at me. Not until I started in on him first, not until I basically called him stupid, until I pushed him away, willing to toss our friendship into the rubbish bin like it meant nothing to me – because he didn't believe me one time.

But it hurt so much when he didn't. Most of the professors didn't even believe me and few if any of the other Houses.

So does that make it okay to act like that to Ron?

Of course not – and yet after all of that, he still takes up his wand against the Death Eaters. His whole family did. Every last Weasley there stood up for me and the others. Why did Voldemort even care about Hogwarts?

Me. Had I not been around. . . .

And then on top of all that, I almost get Fleur killed last night. What was I thinking? I must have bloody well gone mad. Everyone I love or care about is dying around me and what do I do? I take Fleur right into the middle of it all – and get to watch Mrs. Weasley die.

So how many others are going to die because of me?

Harry knew how to stop the trail of death lying behind him; he could accept the destiny laid before him – and walk that path alone. There would be no safety, no peace, and no love untainted for him, until Voldemort was dead.

No safety, no peace, and no love untainted, he repeated to himself, realizing what it meant for him and Fleur.

Of course, every love he knew was tainted, usually with death.

X O X O X O X

After showering and dressing, Fleur walked into the informal dining room where her mother and father were having lunch. "Papa, why aren't you working today?"

"Mon Fille came home this morning. Why should I be at work?"

Fleur kissed him on the cheek before getting a cup from the cabinet. "You know Mon Fille is outdated, even in the wizarding world, don't you Papa?"

"Would you rather I called you Mon Cochon?"

"Not really." She chuckled. "I have no idea how 'Mon Cochon' became a pet name. What is it with us French using names of farm animals as terms of endearment?"

"I have no idea," Fleur's mother answered, walking into the room and pouring a cup of coffee for herself.

Fleur looked around the table, but didn't find what she was looking for and put the cup back in the cabinet. She called a house-elf and whispered instructions to it. The house-elf disappeared and Fleur sat down to wait. "How's Gabrielle?"

Her mother grimaced. "Same as you were, I think."

"I remember it not being fun." Fleur reminisced for a moment before coming back to the present. "What caused it to start early? According to Gabrielle, the last sign started a few days before you came to Hogwarts. I thought it took two months after that before the transformation begins."

Apolline Delacour smirked. "It usually does, but don't you remember how it varies? I'm sure your father does."

Fleur caught her father's eye and they both turned away somewhat embarrassed over the particulars of that night. Her transformation was particularly complete and. . . explosive. It was something a daughter never wants her father to see, accident or not.

"Sometimes," Fleur's mother began as she laughed at the two of them cringing, "when a Veela is infatuated with a young man, it can push our magic to speed up the transformation, like it did with you, or start it early—"

"Like it did with Gabrielle," Fleur finished the sentence, looking out the window at Harry sitting on the bench in the flower garden. She wanted to excuse herself and go to him after what happened last night and this morning, but somehow she knew he needed time to sort everything out in private, just like in the cave that first night. Harry would start talking when he was ready.

The house-elf returned with a cup of tea for Fleur. She thanked the elf before turning back to her mother.

"So you're saying 'Arry pushed her over the edge?" Fleur grinned into her tea.

"Something like that," her mother answered. "Having her prince-charming rescue her, then seeing him again a few months later lit the cauldron fire a little early."

"That's interesting," Fleur answered, not trusting herself to say anything else. She knew her mother was a little too perceptive at times. Worse, she wouldn't leave a subject alone if it meant she could tease her daughter.

"You know, it is amazing how similar you and Gabrielle are, both transforming like you did over a boy."

"Please Maman, don't remind me. Tavian was a spell-wreck."

"That may be, Mon Fille, but you were very taken with him."

A corner of Fleur's lip pulled up. "I'm seventeen and both you and Papa still call me your little girl."

"As your Papa said, we could call you Mon Cochon."

Fleur rolled her eyes. "Anyway, unlike Gabrielle, I wasn't saved by the wizard that caused me to transform quickly, nor was I taken with Tavian. I was taken with his appearance; a mistake I have made all too often it seems, even more so about myself."

Her mother stopped in the middle of raising her cup for a sip, muttering Fleur's last words back to herself.

Fleur thought she was overdoing it a bit. "It's okay Maman, don't worry about it." She gestured out of the window to change the subject. "How's 'Arry doing?"

"I don't know," she answered. "We haven't seen him except through the window."

"Did he sleep?"

"Some. I remembered what you told me about his bad dreams. When I sneaked into his room this morning to put clothes on his bed, I took the opportunity to make sure his dreams were taken care of."

Fleur choked on her tea. "Maman! You didn't give him those types of dreams, did you?"

Her father choked on his coffee as well and his wife laughed at the both of them. "Of course not! I have better control over those abilities than you do. Whoever he dreamed about, was someone his own imagination would have supplied and it would have been a comforting dream, not necessarily a sexual dream."

She gave Fleur a hard look. "So, Daughter, what kind of dreams were you giving him?"

Fleur blushed, but realized she had nothing to be ashamed of and looked straight into her mother's eyes. "Any kind I needed to in order to keep him comfortable, instead of screaming out in pain in the middle of the night."

Her father put his cup down and rubbed his forehead. "I'm not happy to hear about you giving someone those kind of dreams about you." He huffed. "I'd tell you not to do it again, but you're too old, too stubborn, and too argumentative to listen to me anyway."

"Am not," Fleur slipped in with a smirk.

He shook his head, but she could see a tug on his lips before he turned serious again. "I guess I should be more worried about why a fourteen year old boy has—"

"Don't. Call. Him. A. Boy." Fleur growled out.

Both parents looked at her in surprise.

"He may only be fourteen years old, Papa, but he's more of a wizard than half the new graduates you'll employ this summer and more of a man than all of them combined."

Her father pinned Fleur with a stare. "That's a bold statement to make."

"And I have a good reason to make it," Fleur declared. "I've seen wizards twice his age act half as mature and that was in a normal situation, let alone when the dragon shits in the boiling cauldron."

"Fleur!" her mother gasped. "Where did you pick that up? It's crass."

"Crass or not, Maman, it's the truth – I've seen it with my own eyes."

The kitchen went quiet for a minute before her father asked, "What exactly did you see?"

"I. . . I'm not ready to talk about it, Papa. At least let me spend a few hours home first, please?" Fleur ignored the looks she was getting from both of her parents and gestured out the window again. "Has he eaten today?"

"No," her father answered. "Speaking of which, when did you last eat?"

"Last night, at the Burrow – the house of a friend that 'Arry knows. . . knew." Fleur exhaled at the thought of her almost forty-eight hours

at the Burrow. The worn carpets and furniture, trinkets and photos overflowing drawers and desks, a mother that gave of her family and then herself.

Fleur's thoughts expanded to the fourteen and fifteen year old witches and wizard she now knew, still in the middle of a war, a few of them with their own families ripped away already. How many more to come this time?

Her mother reached across the table. "My dear, you look terrible. You know you can tell us anything, right?"

"I know, but like I said, I'm not ready to talk about it yet. I'm going to go check on my sister and Harry."

Fleur finished her tea and set the cup on the table, missing her parents' amusement at the British habit she picked up, but also missing their concerned looks.

X O X O X O X

No safety, no peace, and no love untainted, he repeated to himself, realizing what it meant for him and Fleur.

Love? Why am I thinking of Fleur?

A second memory flooded Harry's mind, Fleur in tears as she slapped him. There was only one other person who had ever slapped Harry across the face and Harry damned well knew his Uncle didn't love him, nor he his Uncle. So what does that say about Fleur? How could she resort to the same thing Uncle Vernon did? How else was she like him?

She kept him away from Sirius last night. She stopped him from running after him. And what about Mrs. Weasley? What if I was out there? She kept me away from my real family, just like Uncle Vernon did every summer, not letting me talk to them on the phone or even get owls.

Harry shook his head. That wasn't fair. Fleur was doing what Sirius wanted her to do, she didn't complain when Harry flew into the battle. She even cast spells to keep him safe. No, it was Harry that had almost gotten her killed.

There was no way Fleur was the same as his uncle. She cared about him. She made him feel. . . what? Better? What was that about?

What was she doing? She giggled and blushed and made me laugh. But why? Did she really care, really mean any of those things? How can she care about me if she slaps me – if she does the same thing Uncle Vernon did? Sure as Agrippa's left nut my Uncle didn't love me or care for me. Aunt Petunia never tended to me, regardless of what happened. . . .

So how can Fleur slap me like Uncle did, but also tend to me? Was it just that we spent so much time with each other? Was that it? Maybe she still thought I was just a little boy who had to be taken care of?

Harry was so completely confused by this point that he would have almost preferred climbing back into the cupboard under the stairs for a few days.

He snorted. I wouldn't even fit anymore.

Harry sighed and walked back to his room thinking about how the discontinuity in his life now was even greater than that summer he'd learned he was a wizard.

Sometimes, a thought echoes in the mind until it dominates every other thought, pushing them away.

Other times, it's just a word.

Life.

What cruel word. What good was life now? He was sick and tired of people dying for him. How many were there? Voldemort had killed his parents; Voldemort through Quirrell caused Ron to be injured; Lucius Malfoy cost Ginny and Hermione months out of their lives; Peter Pettigrew cost Sirius years – and betrayed Harry's parents; those Death Eaters tortured Neville's parents; Death Eaters killed Susan's parents—



Harry stumbled on the path at the realization that it could all be traced back to one person, someone whom nobody had been able to stop.

Except him.

The prophecy was right! He had beaten Voldemort three times already.

Like the dawn of the desert morning, the truth cast its harsh light on him, only this sunrise was as black as coal and a harbinger of the coming destruction Harry could not yet see.

But he could see the truth. It was time to not only defeat Voldemort, but to kill him, to make sure he's dead. And since I must die in order to kill him, why not take as many Death Eaters with me as possible, payback for what they've taken from everyone else, and while I'm at it, why not use their own beloved Dark Arts to shove it all right up their collective arse?

Why the bloody hell shouldn't I? I am going to die anyway. What's left for me now?

Love?

Who do I love that's still alive?

Fleur?

I care about Fleur – even if she doesn't me.

But do I love her? I think I would've if she felt the same way – and I didn't have a Dark Lord hanging over my head. Nothing I can do about Fleur now, except try to make sure she's safe.

Sirius? Remus?

If they're not dead already, they will be if I don't kill Voldemort and as many of his Death Eaters as possible. After what happened at the graveyard, that'd make Fleur safer as well.

Neville?

I'd be doing him a favor. I take on the strength to avenge his parents, my parents, kill as many of the bastards as possible, then give up my own life to make sure Voldemort dies. Neville gets to live on, without damaging his own soul by killing me.

Susan? Cho? Others?

How long will it be before they're murdered, or raped in their homes by a Death Eater, or strung out across another body-ridden killing field?

A killing field; Auror Tonks was right calling it that. Why can't killing fields be filled with bodies of Death Eaters instead?

If I'm going to die either way, why can't I make my own killing field?

Harry made it back up the hill and into his room. Sitting at the desk facing the wall opposite of the sliding doors, he pulled out the books that were safely stored in his cloak and began reading. He knew that in some ways, he was acting out of love for everyone he had just thought about, much in the same way his mother did when she sacrificed herself for him.

It's just that this time, this sacrifice would cause death as well as protect others from it.

X O X O X O X

"She didn't tell us a thing." Jacques said after Fleur walked out of the room.

"We have to be patient." Apolline moved over to the chair next to her husband and laid her hand on top of his. "I'm sure it isn't as bad as we're making it out to be."

He shook his head. "No, My Love, it's much worse than we thought. There is speculation in my department that as many as thirty died at Hogwarts, maybe even some of the Seventh Year students. Keep in mind, we haven't heard from Madam Maxime, either."

Jacques set his cup on the table. "When I floo-ed the office this morning to tell Philippe I wasn't coming in, you should have seen his relief. He was too damn happy to have Fleur on this side of la

Manche. I asked him why, but all he would say was, 'It's bad.' He refused to say anything more through an open floo connection."

"That doesn't mean it's as bad as you're making it out to be. Jacque, relax and be happy you have your daughter home safe."

"That I will most definitely do, but. . . ."

"What's really bothering you?" Apolline asked, leaning into the table to be a little closer to him.

He wrestled with his answer, not sure he even wanted to broach the subject, but knew he wouldn't get away with not telling her. "I'm wondering how long it will be before I must raise my wand to kill again."

The weight of what he was seeing in his family's future was making it hard for him to even breathe. "What about Fleur's friend in our other bedroom?" he finally choked out.

"What about him?" She asked, her voice firm.

Jacque knew that voice. The Veela matriarchal drive to protect family and young was strong, regardless of whether the Zekānōt chose to put them through the Gegenumenou and awaken the full Veela within.\* "He is welcomed here in the short term, but I worry."

"About?"

He hesitated for a second, deciding he didn't want to argue with his wife and answered with another, though much less, concern. "About what will happen when Gabrielle sees him before her magic is under control. I think Monsieur Potter should occupy the downstairs apartment instead of our guest bedroom next to an emerging and as yet, uncontrolled Veela."

"I don't think it'll be a problem," his wife answered, "but it's still a good idea. He will want privacy."

Jacque nodded, thinking he had done well to sidestep the much bigger concern, at least for now.

He hadn't. "Don't congratulate yourself on changing your answer, Jacque. I know that's not what has you worried."

He grunted. "You know me too well, Apolline."

She leaned back in her chair, taking her hand off his and raising her eyebrow at him in an unspoken request to come clean.

He finally came out with it. "The Death Eaters are back."

"Death Eaters?" she repeated in surprise. "Please tell me you're lying."

"I wish so. Like I said, before I came home yesterday a number of reports came in concerning numerous sightings in Britain over the previous eighteen hours. If I take that and add it to Philippe's reactions this morning, I can only come to one conclusion. Something major concerning the Death Eaters is happening in Britain and that young man in our bedroom may be a prime target."

Jacque clenched his teeth together, his eyes fixated on a point on the wall and his voice hard. "I did not help rid France of Death Eaters thirteen years ago only to put a target on my family's back now, but that's exactly what I'm doing by giving shelter to Harry Potter."

He pushed back from the table and walked out of the kitchen without another word.

Apolline clasped her hands together to keep them from shaking. She'd only seen this side of her husband while the previous war raged in Wizarding Britain. It was a poorly kept secret that the problems and bigotries so rampant across la Manche had taken root in France – as did the war.

In those days, Jacque was a young Apparition teacher in the French magical government, but as the battles intensified, every wand was called upon. Apolline remembered waiting for him to come home, fear palpable night after night as the hands of the clock wound their way to the morning hours, only to see her husband Apparate home dangerously wounded time after time.

Then there was that last night. She could see the lights flaring from curses in the valley below. It was the first time she truly saw and understood what her husband was going through. Fear had ripped through her when the lights from the curses suddenly ceased that night. In their place, sounds of Apparition echoed through the valley so loud they shook the windows of the Delacour mansion. It was eleven pm, the night before All Saints day, 1981.

She'd never forget when her husband showed up an hour later. Reports had come across la Manche that Voldemort had been defeated. The battle she'd seen had ended when the Death Eaters felt the destruction of their Dark Lord. . . .

. . . And the reason the war ended that night, was now under their roof – and he needed their help.

Apolline walked into the large, open family room where her husband was sitting on the small love seat, looking out over the valley and sat next to him.

"My love," she began, "the boy that is walking up the very same path you walked that last night you fought Death Eaters, is the boy that ended that war. Will you turn him away now that he is need of help?"

He looked at her.

Apolline Delacour, for the first time in her life, feared her husband. No one could stare into those eyes and not be afraid for his or her life.

Warriors have a certain look to them, even if they start out in life as a Apparition teachers. No matter how many years the warrior hides beneath the surface of a family man, it remains, just below the surface.

His voice shook her out of her thoughts. "You know me better than that, Apolline. You have no need to even ask," he growled before facing his wife, his voice now as cold as a sepulcher. "I will not refuse him short-term shelter, or the help he needs. To do so would be both irresponsible and wrong, but if he brings danger to this family, I will turn this house, this town, this country into Abaddon's lair before I let you or one of my daughters suffer. If that means

turning against 'Arry Potter, then I will do it. My family will not be hurt."

Apolline tried to calm her breathing as she reached over and placed a still shaking hand on the back of his neck, playing with his hair. "This is one of the reasons I married you. You care too much for those whom you love. But I also know you care much for those who are in need of love."

She paused, letting it sink in. "His story isn't a secret, mon Cher. I expect you to do no less for him, nor worry any less about your wife and daughters." She leaned over and kissed him, still proud to be married to the man after all these years, even more so now after seeing a hint of what he had to become to protect his family. She couldn't help but wonder how many others had become the same thing.

Looking out the window, Harry was just now cresting the hill to go back into his room, but the look on his young face was eerily reminiscent of her husband's.

What the . . . ?

She shook off the thought. Chances are, he and Fleur were stuck at the school with everyone else and got to France as soon as possible. There's no way a boy the age of Harry Potter could have the same experiences as her husband and others that fought day after day in that war.

Apolline kissed her husband before leaving the room, deciding that it was time to introduce herself to the young wizard.

X O X O X O X

After leaving the kitchen, Fleur went back to her room to put away the items from her trunk before seeing her sister. Finished floating and banishing everything to their respective places, she walked down to the other end of the hall. Quietly, she opened the door and whispered, "Gabrielle?"

"Fleur?" a faint whisper returned.

"How are you feeling?" she asked, walking into the room. Gabrielle reached for her wand and a moment later, the room filled with a soft light.

"Oh, Gabrielle! You should see yourself!"

"Am I as beautiful as you?"

Fleur was caught short, amazed at how such a simple question could be so complex. The Veela heritage assured that Gabrielle would be gorgeous, but Fleur's little sister was more than that, she was beautiful in a way Fleur so desperately wanted to be.

"It's okay," Gabrielle continued, a little saddened when Fleur didn't answer right away. "I just hoped that we could look like sisters again."

Fleur sat at the edge of her bed. "You're beautiful, now I want you promise me something."

"Okay, I promise."

Fleur snickered. "How can you say you'll promise when you don't even know what you're promising?"

"Because I trust you; you're my heroine!"

A heroine? Fleur thought to herself. It was a hero that saved you when I couldn't, a hero that saved me from Voldemort, a hero that I forced to Portkey to France – forced to stop being a hero for others.

But wasn't that the right thing? She argued with herself, forgetting where she was. He would have died if he stayed.

That may be, she continued silently, but what I did when we got here, was that right?

"What's wrong?" Gabrielle asked, quickly trying to sit up.

Fleur reached out and stopped her, softly laying her head back down on the pillow. "Don't move so fast," she said. "When I was going through this, any sudden movement made me so dizzy I thought I'd get sick."

"I'm already sick." Gabrielle switched to English. "I zthink you mean you wanted to puke, or ralph, or upchuck!"

Fleur squeezed her eyebrows together. "Zhat's rather crude! And since when is your English so good?"

Gabrielle switched back to French. "They're great words, aren't they! I learned them from an American witch I'm friends with now. We practice speaking English one day and French the next."

Fleur gazed at her sister proudly, just a few weeks away from becoming a legal Veela adult. "I'm impressed, but remember not to use them around Maman. She speaks English as well and you'd send her into full-feather if she heard you using them."

Gabrielle laughed and wrapped her older sister in a big hug. "I missed you. I'm sorry we couldn't watch. I guess, I guess I was a little too excited about seeing 'Arry again. As soon as I saw him everything just went strange."

"It's happened to more than one witch." Fleur stopped for a second, trying not to laugh at the unintended admission. "Did Maman tell you what caused my transformation to happen so quickly?"

"She said you got kissed!"

Fleur laughed. "Oh, did I ever. I started changing about half a minute into it. By the time I got home, I already looked like this. About three seconds after I got through the door, I changed again."

Gabrielle gasped. "You went right into your bird form?"

"Yeah, it was so traumatic I even started molting."

Gabrielle laughed so hard she grabbed her head and moaned.

"Easy, Gabby," Fleur reminded her.

When she was able to speak again, Gabrielle had to ask, "Did you really molt?"



"Probably not, but there were so many feathers in the foyer that it looked like I did. Papa still swears that's what happened."

Gabrielle's eyes widened. "Was Papa there when you changed?"

"Yeah. I think we're both still scarred from it, too."

"I would be so embarrassed."

"I was. Last thing I ever wanted him to see was me as a naked adult Veela. But if you haven't practiced using your Veela magic to banish your clothes safely, that's exactly what's going to happen."

Fleur watched as a look of horror crossed Gabrielle's face and waited for the next question she knew was coming.

"Would you teach me as soon as I'm ready? I really don't want to do that in front of Papa."

Fleur almost teased Gabrielle, telling her that she wouldn't want to do it in front of Harry either, but she figured it wouldn't be a good idea to let Gabrielle know Harry was in the house; at least not yet, so she just answered the question.

"What are big sisters for?"

Gabrielle grinned madly. "Thanks!" But after a few more seconds, her mood seemed to shift.

"Um, Fleur, was Papa mad at you when you transformed?"

"Of course not. Why?"

"He just seems mad at me all the time now. Well, not really mad, but, upset."

"I think it has more to do with his little girl growing up," Fleur said. "Papases usually have four or five years to get used their daughters becoming women, but, four days ago you were a little girl and now you have the body of a twenty-two year old model."

Gabrielle beamed.

"And in a few weeks your other changes will be finished making you a legal Veela adult, which means Papa can't stop you from making decisions or even getting married. He's just upset because he's losing his last little girl."

Gabrielle nodded. "I don't like him being upset with me."

"Don't worry, he's not upset with you. Papa loves us too much to be upset about something like that. He just worries that we'll be safe and find the right guy and whatever else papas always worry about."

"I guess." Gabrielle changed the subject. "So why did everything happened so fast for you, if it usually takes weeks?"

"Maman asked the Zekānōt when she announced my transformation. They said sometimes it just happens that way." Fleur adjusted the way she was leaning on the bed. "Nothing else sped up though, It still took me a couple weeks before I could do more than sit up for an hour and another week or so to gain full control of my Veela magic."

"Really? It just takes a week?"

"About that. Veela magic isn't like wizard magic, it's more like breathing. You do it naturally, but you can learn to hold your breath, or blow it out really hard. You can hold in your Veela magic, or you can push it out really hard, but either way, you don't really have to think about it that much, especially after you've learned how to control it. Anyway, there's no reason to apologize for missing the tournament. After all, you can't help who you're attracted to."

"I know, I just wish we could have been there that night."

"I'm rather happy you were home safe," Fleur said cryptically. "So, 'Arry Potter? I guess he is kind of cute, isn't he?"

"Who?" Gabrielle asked innocently.

Fleur motioned to the pictures and articles on her walls. "Don't be coy, Gabby!"

She giggled, lowered her head down a little, and looked up at Fleur from under her eyelashes, giving Fleur the first glimpse of the sultry look an adult Gabrielle was going to be able to pull off.

Fleur groaned quietly, knowing the look was completely unintentional, which made it so much worse. When she learned how to use it, on top of the natural Veela charms. . . . "Gabby, you're going to be trouble, aren't you?" She asked.

Gabrielle giggled again and Fleur groaned louder.

"Anyway, I want you to remember that many, many wizards and Vulgaire men are going to be as attracted to you as you seem to be to 'Arry."

"I know, I've seen wizards around you. Don't worry, I've watched you and know exactly how to ignore them."

Fleur touched her younger sister's arm. "That's part of what I want you to promise me. Be nice to them, Gabrielle, it's not you who are attracting them; it's the Veela in you. You will have to be firm, but please, be nice."

"Okay," Gabrielle said, as if it made all the sense in the world. Fleur was again amazed at how much her not-so-little sister trusted her.

"You said that was part of it, what else did you want me to promise?" she asked.

"Don't confuse your looks with being beautiful. You'll find out someday soon that being a Veela is wonderful and being gorgeous, for us, is easy. But we are also human and it's very difficult to be a beautiful human. Just keep asking yourself, 'Would a blind wizard think I'm beautiful today,' okay?"

"But a blind wizard can't see!" she protested.

"I know, that's my point."

Gabrielle scrunched up her eyebrows. "It must be a maturity thing."

Fleur laughed, then bent down and kissed her sister's cheek. "You'll understand soon enough. The last part of your transformation is

maturity. It takes a few more weeks, plus experience, but just keep being who you are and remember the question; ask it often of yourself."

"Okay."

"Good. When you're feeling better" – Fleur paused and looked at her sister, realizing again that even without Veela magic, her affect on wizards would be tremendous – "and you have all your Veela powers under control, we'll go out and celebrate your becoming an adult. Okay?"

Gabrielle's face split from ear to ear. "That'd be great! We can go to the Wizarding Street and we can shop and I'll take you to Vulgaire Paris and show you an American store that serves all types of coffee and you can show me how to act like a Veela in public and we—"

Fleur laughed again. "Slow down. I'm not going anywhere for a while, so we can do whatever you want when you're ready."

"I can't wait! Thanks for coming home. I really did miss you."

"I've missed you, too," Fleur answered. But as her eyes lingered on the younger Veela, her thoughts wandered to another country where newly found friends were missing parents and loved ones, where witches a little older than Gabrielle had died a few days ago to protect their little sisters and brothers, where a witch named Ginny Weasley died for Harry and her and the other Champions.

Fleur exited the room so Gabrielle wouldn't see her struggling with her emotions again.

X O X O X O X

Apolline was walking to Harry's bedroom when she heard Fleur talking to her younger daughter. There was something in her voice that made Apolline stop and listen.

It was nice to hear the two of them laughing together again. But when she saw Fleur emerge from the room, she wasn't laughing anymore. Apolline put her arms around her daughter and held on tightly.

"Shh, Fleur. Whatever it is, we are here," her mother said after a few minutes.

"It's just been so much."

"I can tell. I'm starting to worry, mon Fille."

"There's no need. It's just time for me to grow up."

Apolline nodded, a little surprised. "Does growing up having anything to do with being a beautiful human?"

"You heard that?"

"I did, what did you mean?"

Fleur had to clear her throat before she could talk. "It's just that I realized I don't want someone to just be in love with me as a Veela, I want them to be in love me as a human as well; I want them to see through the Veela looks to who I am, and love me for, for being me and if I am not so beautiful when he sees past the Veela like he does then why will he ever stay with me?" She finally took a breath.

"He?" Apolline turned to the side so Fleur could see the door to Harry's bedroom.

She watched a myriad of emotions flash across her daughter's face before Fleur answered. "That's something else I don't want to talk about, but I could do so much worse."

"I thought you wanted an older, stayed wizard, 'Someone with status and direction,' I think you said last summer."

"I want someone who loves me, not gives me status. You didn't raise me to care about status anyway. Direction, we can find together."

With that, Apolline found herself being hugged again before she was left alone, standing in the hallway.

She was both ecstatic and horrified over the daughter who had returned. Fleur had finally grown up, but what crucible wrought such change so quickly?

X O X O X O X

A little later in the afternoon, Fleur was standing in the kitchen, arguing with a house-elf.

"No, Mademoiselle Fleur. Froissé be doing the cooking!"

"Froissé, you cook wonderfully, but I want to make something special for someone."

"Mademoiselle Fleur think Froissé not cook special enough?" Tears gathered at the bottom of her eyes.

"It's always special, but I. . . ." Fleur stopped for a second, thinking about how to express what she wanted to say. "I want to serve like Froissé serves so I can be happy."

"Why would Mademoiselle Fleur do that? Mademoiselle Fleur likes to be served, not serve others."

Fleur knelt down, eye-level with the elf. "That Fleur was left in Britain, hopefully never to be heard from again. But this Fleur wants to serve my friend, so that I can be happy, like Froissé is happy when she serves, yes?"

The house-elf clumped onto her. "Froissé is happy. Froissé's Mademoiselle Fleur is home. Not nasty Mademoiselle Fleur from Beauxbatons."

Ouch, guess I deserved that. "It took me a while to find my way back, but I'm trying. So will Froissé let me cook so I can serve my friend?"

"Mademoiselle Fleur can help Froissé cook!"

Fleur sighed, figuring that was the best offer she was going to get. "Alright."

Together, they prepared croissants and fruit tarts for Le Goûter, the equivalent to a late afternoon snack, though no self-respecting French citizen, Vulgaire or wizard, would admit it as such. Le Goûter is a much more sophisticated. . . snack.

X O X O X O X

"Arry?"

Harry wondered how long it would be before she sought him out. He also wondered why his stomach was doing flips at the sound of her voice. Hadn't he settled this issue already?

He opened the door and walked back to the chair he'd been sitting in.

"Papa and Maman say you 'aven't eaten today. Is zhis true?"

Harry nodded once.

"Please 'Arry, say somezhing." Fleur set the tray on the coffee table and sat down next to him in the other chair.

He looked up at her and was taken in by her eyes – as if he was looking through a window into the softest, almost Maya blue sky. His heart caught in his throat.

"I'm, I'm not sure what to say," he whispered.

Why did Fleur have this affect on him? She didn't back at the Burrow, well, not totally. He knew it wasn't her magic, but everything he had decided on just a little earlier seemed to have dissolved as soon as she walked into the room.

"Zhen let me begin. I was mad zhis morning 'Arry. You almost left me and if you did, zhere would be no way I could get you to France and safety." Fleur's voice got quieter. "I didn't want you to die. I couldn't 'ave zhat."

"But, that's where I belong." Harry countered. "Not here. Not somewhere in the middle of France safe when everyone I've ever known in my world is being killed."

Fleur looked down. Harry almost missed it when she began speaking again a few moments later. "Your godfather wanted me to bring you to France. When you're ready 'Arry, I promise" – tears started and Harry had to fight himself from reaching out to her – "I

promise I won't stop you from going back, but only when you're ready. Please don't do it now. Please 'Arry?"

He sat silently.

"Do you promise?" she almost begged.

This is worse than fighting Voldemort! Thankfully, he didn't say that out loud. "I guess. I really don't have a choice, do I?"

Fleur smiled and handed him a croissant. "It won't be as good as what you bought me yesterday, but it should be edible I zhink, no?"

Harry took a bite. "I can see why you weren't happy with English food. This is really good." He could see from the way she was looking at him that he at least did something right, so he tried the fruit tart and complimented it as well.

She was beaming. "Zhank you, my 'ouse-elf and I made zhem for you."

Harry suddenly found himself very uncomfortable. It was one thing for him to buy gifts for others, or to get something from Ron or Hermione, but for Fleur to cook for him? Where does that fall on the line between taking care of a little boy and love?"

"You didn't have to do that Fleur. I'm sorry to be a bother."

"A bother? Non, 'Arry, I wanted to make zhis for you."

Harry clamped his mouth shut, tightly, before the questions that were right there on his tongue spilled out, questions he so desperately wanted answers to – why did she help him? Did she care about him? Did she love. . . Harry mentally stumbled over that one. He knew it was foolish to think he'd ever be that lucky and if he was, it'd just cause more grief once he did what he had to do after killing Voldemort.

Fleur changed the subject. "Papa said you can stay zhe apartment downstairs. It is a little more private and not across zhe hall from a transforming Veela. It might not be so good to 'ave 'er 'ero next to 'er. Maybe her magic is stronger zhen mine, no? Zhat's not a chance I zhink I want to take."



The wink confirmed that she was playing with him, trying to ease him into this peaceful world she had violently flung him into, but for the second time that day a single word reverberated in Harry's thoughts.

Hero.

No, heroes don't endanger friends nor do they take someone who should be fawned over into the middle of a battle on the back of a broomstick.

"I'm no hero, Fleur."

Fleur lifted her hand to touch Harry's face, but he reacted involuntarily, flinching back and cringing.

Fleur gasped. "Non, 'Arry. Non, non, non. I wasn't going to 'it you, I would never 'it. . ." her voice trailed off as she closed her eyes and dropped her head to her chest.

"I'm sorry," she whispered before quickly leaving the room.

Not knowing what else to do and having no idea how to handle the emotions of an older witch, let alone a quarter-Veela, Harry stared at the door as it closed behind her.

Throughout his life, and so much more over the last few days, Harry had screwed the lid down on his emotions. When they did emerge, his emotions showed themselves as rage or anger or even pain. But the free flowing emotion he saw from Fleur both attracted him and scared him; and in the end, he couldn't deal with it, not if he wanted to succeed in what he needed to do.

Harry retrieved the book he'd hidden under the pillows on the bed. He had hid it because he remembered Fleur's reaction in the cave when she read the title, *A Dark Journey to Power*, and didn't want to see what her reaction would have been this time.

Hopefully, he could learn about the journey wizards before him had taken, maybe even find out why some of them got so out of control.

Even though Harry knew his destiny, he didn't want to lose himself in the journey, not completely anyway.

X O X O X O X

Dinner was usually served late in the Delacour home.

Fleur, in her bedroom, used numerous charms and ready-to-use potions so she didn't look like she been crying most of the afternoon. It wasn't that she wanted to hide it for vanity's sake, but rather, after the way she came home this morning and what her mother saw earlier, Fleur didn't want to give them any more reason to worry during dinner.

"Have I told you how happy I am to have you home?" her father asked as she walked into the informal dining room just off the kitchen.

"Three or four times, I think," Fleur answered with a light laugh.

He chuckled, but quickly turned serious. "We've been very worried about you, afraid you were caught up in whatever was happening across la Manche."

Fleur sat down. "We were."

Her mother came into the dining room. "Should I go see if 'Arry wants to eat?"

"No," Fleur answered. "I made him something for Le Goûter. If he wants dinner, I'll take it to him after we're finished. He probably wants to be alone right now."

Fleur again missed the look her parents shared.

"Then we will have this night to ourselves to celebrate your return," her father announced. "I'll cook." He got up and walked into the kitchen.

"Won't Froissé be upset?" Fleur asked.

"I gave her the task of redecorating the downstairs apartment. She and the other elves are all happily making it suitable for Monsieur Potter."

"Oh. Well, if you're cooking, could you make an English dish? 'Arry has never had a real French meal. He's used to the heavier English foods and I really doubt he likes bouillabaisse." She smiled at the memory.

Fleur barely caught sight of her father, leaning back and staring at her from the entrance to the kitchen, though she was very aware – and very much ignoring – her mother who wasn't trying too hard to restrain her own grin.

Maman, why do you have to be so bloody perceptive? Zut! How many English habits have I picked up this year?

"Well then, I will make something for us, and then an English dish for 'arry Potter so he can eat in private after we are finished."

Fleur heard him chuckling as he pulled out pots and pans, enjoying the physical work of cooking for a reason neither mother nor daughter ever understood.

"We've only had sketchy reports at work," her father was saying a while later as they began eating. "What happened at 'Ogwarts."

"A dragon almost burnt her skirt off, I heard."

Fleur's fork clattered to her plate. "'Arry?"

His smile had a dark tinge to it, almost bitter, but not quite. "Sorry to startle you."

"We are informal here," Fleur's father said to him. "Take a plate off the buffet cabinet and come eat with us, or if you wait, I'll make you an English dish that you're more familiar with."

"Thank you, sir, but this will be fine." Harry walked into the room and turned his back to Fleur to pick up a plate and utensils.

She noticed that the trousers he was wearing almost fit him. They were much better than the weekend clothes she'd seen him wearing

around Hogwarts. The legs were a bit long, but the trousers were definitely tighter in the derrière and that was good. Well, wait a second, that seemed to be very good – Fleur blushed as Harry turned around.

Seeing his shirt, she rolled her eyes. "Papa, did you pick out 'Arry's shirt zhis morning?"

"No, mon Fille, I chose it," her mother answered. "Why do you ask?"

Fleur glanced at her mother, who was looking at her rather intently and smirking now.

"I was wondering, Maman, why you chose to put zhe jersey of zhe French national team on zhe back of an English wizard?"

"Well, since 'e's in France," she began, "'e should try to fit in and a French jersey always makes an English wizard look good. I zhought it would go well with zhe trousers, don't you zhink so?" she asked, winking at Fleur.

Her smirk grew a little larger.

I'm going to so get you back for this, Maman.

Fleur was saved by Harry. "Speaking of which, I was going to ask where I could buy some clothes tomorrow. I guess I also need to wash what I was wearing this morning as well."

Fleur began to answer, but was cut off by her mother, who looked to be enjoying herself a little too much. "I don't zhink Fleur would mind you wearing zhose trousers and jersey again tomorrow. We can wash zhem tonight."

Fleur turned bright red, growled out a warning to her mother in French, and answered Harry's question. "Zhere's a store zhat sells shirts in town. You should be able to get some trousers zhere as well."

"Um, okay. Thanks."

Fleur knew something was off, but couldn't figure out what it was.

"Arry," Jacque began, "They sell, 'ow do you say it, boxers? Yes, boxer shorts there.

"Thank you, sir." Harry answered, turning slightly red.

Fleur had to bite her lip to stop from laughing at his flush, but didn't fail to notice again just how cute it was.

"Arry," Fleur's mother began in a serious but warm tone, "It is very nice to meet zhe young man zhat is a 'ero to both of my daughters."

"Thank you, ma'am." stammered Harry. "And no ma'am, I am not a hero. Fleur is more of a hero than me."

"You are 'umble as well as adorable, don't you zhink so, Fleur?" her mother asked. Fleur tried to kick her under the table and growled out another warning in French. It included a couple words that her mother hadn't heard in a number of years.

Harry's slight blush turned fire engine red.

"Also 'Arry," she continued, after promising Fleur she'd behave, "zhere is no reason to be formal in zhis 'ouse. A simple 'oui' or 'non' is sufficient."

"Oui?" Harry asked.

Fleur could have sworn she saw his eyes flick towards her before looking back at her mother.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I don't understand French. Is 'we' like 'us' or 'my'? Or is it 'yes'?"

He glanced at Fleur and she noticed his expression softening. It wasn't much, but it was a start. She flashed a big smile back at him and again ignored her mother's grin.

"Arry," her father began, more focused on what the future held for all of them than a budding romance in the dining room, "why do you say Fleur is more of a 'ero than you?"

"Non, Papa. We are not zpeaking of zhat at dinner."

"Fleur, when I 'ear my daughter praised like that, it makes me curious to know what you 'ave done and you 'ave avoided the conversation all day."

Fleur anglicized Papa to drive home the point. "Father, you will not make 'Arry speak of it during dinner."

She received uplifted eyebrows in response, but the subject was dropped. The rest of dinner consisted of talk about Wizarding France. Harry found out that the Muggle French National Hockey team was gaining in popularity amongst the French Magicals (which explained the jersey he was wearing). Of course, it was mainly because the hockey team had won the World Championship last year and the French Quidditch team . . . well, it really wasn't worth talking about.

But as a sport, both Fleur's father and Harry loved Quidditch. Fleur and her mother watched as the two wizards began to build a bond over Porskoff Ploys, Zagob deeks, and Wronski Feints.

X O X O X O X

After dinner, they retired to a large sitting room on the other side of the house. The fireplace took up an entire corner. The firebox was made of field stones cut and smoothed. The rest of it, including the chimney, was built out of Carrar White marble, intricately carved with the Fleur-di-lis centered on the mantle.

The room itself was large, with a cathedral ceiling far above their heads. Two chairs and a small love seat sat in front of the fireplace. Mrs. Delacour claimed one of the chairs and motioned her husband to the other one.

Fleur groaned, to her amusement.

"Comfortable, 'Arry?" Mrs. Delacour teased once they were all settled.

"Stop it, Maman. I zhink 'Arry 'as been teased enough."

As Fleur spoke, Harry felt her hand running through the back of his hair and pressed back gently, savoring the touch.

"It's getting so long," she said a few moments later, combing her fingers through it.

"I haven't had time to get it cut since just before the Yule ball."

"Zhat's okay, I zhink it looks very good on you."

"Mr. Delacour, you were asking about Hogwarts earlier?" Harry asked to change the subject before he completely forgot everything he had promised himself earlier in the day.

"We don't need to talk about zhat, 'Arry," Fleur reminded him.

Harry disagreed. "I'm sure your parents want to hear about it. You and the other Champions saved my life. That's something they should know about."

Fleur's parents looked at her wide-eyed.

"It's not necessary to tell zhem," Fleur answered. "At least not zhat part."

"Then tell us something," her father said. "We've been getting reports at the Ministry that it may be upwards of thirty or more teachers and adults that were killed, maybe even a few of the older students."

"I wish it was true," Harry mumbled.

"Pardon me? What do you mean?" Mr. Delacour asked.

"I meant, I wish it were only thirty."

Fleur's father leaned forward, his voice barely above a whisper. "'Ow many?"

"Almost all of them."

"All the adults?" he asked, astonished.

"No," Harry answered. "Almost everyone; adults, students - there's only a few of us left alive. Even more would have died, but they fought the Death Eaters so the younger ones could escape."

"Non!" He was suddenly pale. "Madame Maxime?"

"She's dead," Fleur answered in a faltering voice.

Harry took Fleur's hand without even thinking about it, trying to give her support and strength through the physical contact and wondering why he reacted so strongly to her every time the slightest thing was wrong – except when it involved him.

"I didn't see 'er body, but a few others saw 'er die. Zhey were clearing zhe maze looking for us and didn't bother trying to protect zhemselves."

"But, 'ow?"

Harry and Fleur looked at each other for what seemed like forever before Fleur quietly answered.

"He rose, Papa."

"Who rose?" Mrs. Delacour asked, cutting off her husband who was just about to probably ask the same question.

"Voldemort." A shift took place in Harry as he answered, his voice expressionless and monotone.

Mrs. Delacour gasped.

Looking at her, Harry saw sadness and fear mixed in her expression as she stared back.

Mr. Delacour sat up straight and his voice boomed through the house, blustering in denial. "Do you know how many murders happened in France because of him and his Death Eaters? That's a hell of a thing to say, young man. Just how sure are you?"

Harry snorted, trying to keep the anger that began to rise out of his voice. "Sure? He had me bound and used my blood in a ritual to gain a new body." Harry pulled up the sleeve of his jersey and



showed them the wound that was just now beginning to close properly. "This is where his Death Eater cut me."

Mr. Delacour turned white as his denial grew stronger. "It can't be! There's no way 'e would 'ave let you go!"

Fleur's eyes narrowed. "No? It can't be? Zhen explain 'ow I saw 'im torture 'Arry, Papa; 'ow 'e killed one of zhe other Champions, or 'ow 'e raised 'is wand to kill me! 'E would 'ave too if 'Arry 'adn't saved my life."

"What do you mean, 'raised his wand to kill you'?" Mr. Delacour responded in a low and dangerous voice. "Tell me you weren't dueling Voldemort."

"Yes, I was! 'E had his wand on me and was casting zhe killing curse."

"AND YOU JUST STOOD ZHERE AND LET 'IM?" her mother exploded.

"NO!" Fleur shouted back. "I JUST KILLED THE BASTARD NEXT TO HIM!"

"She saved my life," Harry said, hoping to calm the two Veelas down. "Voldemort was hitting me with the Cruciatus Curse, then moved on to a few others. Fleur and the other Champions were at the bottom of a little hill. I told them to leave but they wouldn't listen to me. Instead, they raced up it and killed Five Death Eaters, but one of the other Champions was also killed by Voldemort, then he turned his wand on Fleur. It was only after she saved me that I was able to save her."

It was amazing how loud silence could be.

"You murdered someone?" her mother whispered.

"No! I saved 'Arry's life."

"But 'Arry just said—"

Fleur cut her off, loudly. "'E said zhat I killed zhe Death Eater! Killed, not murdered! Zhey were torturing Harry! 'E was torturing Harry!"

Fleur's voice rose even louder and she began gesticulating wildly, Harry had no idea how they were still speaking in English while being this upset.

"Do you know what it's like sitting at the bottom of a little 'ill and 'earing a fourteen year old man being Cruciated repeatedly? 'Ave you ever looked up and watched curses light up the night sky, knowing every one of them 'it the very person who saved your sister's life? Non, Maman. The other two Champions and I rushed to the top of the 'ill and killed three of them. Cedric was killed by Voldemort when turned on me. 'Arry saved my life. We were able to kill two more before 'Arry won 'is duel with Voldemort and we Apparated back to the school."

Her parents looked like the air had been sucked out of the room.

"Ow did you do it," Mr. Delacour finally asked Harry.

"Do what?" Fleur asked before Harry could say anything.

"How did he save your life?"

"Do you really want to know?" She questioned. Harry could hear a tone of warning telling both parents to leave the subject alone.

Her father conceded. "So he saved you and what, you ran back to the school?"

Fleur took Harry's hand again and held on tightly as they told her parents the rest of the story, up to using the Portkey to get to France.

For his part, Harry found himself so thoroughly confused about Fleur that for the first time in his life, he was happy to be talking about his exploits. At least he didn't have to think about everything he was feeling as she now leaned against him, her head on his shoulder and her hands holding his.

". . . And that's how we ended up here this morning," Harry finished. "I apologize for being a bother and promise to be out of your way as soon as I can find somewhere to stay."

"What?" Fleur sat up and turned on him, eyes narrowing at him this time.

"It would seem, Monsieur Potter," Mrs. Delacour began with another smile, "zhat my daughter is not 'appy with zhat plan. I zhink maybe you will stay in zhe downstairs apartment for a while, no?"

"I – I'm not sure if I should do that." Harry answered, a bit quieter.

"Why?" Fleur asked. There was that look again, the look that made Harry want to move mountains just to make her happy.

"I guess I'm not comfortable living here without helping, or paying rent or something."

"Rent?" Mr. Delacour repeated. "Do you have the means to pay rent, 'Arry?"

"Yes, sir, depending on how much it is."

"You are not going to charge 'Arry rent, Papa! Maman, tell 'im!"

"Fleur, I will charge him rent if that is what 'e wants. 'Arry, do you know 'ow much rent is?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Delacour thought for a few seconds. "This is what we will do. I will charge you one Galleon a month to live in the apartment downstairs, eat our food, and treat this 'ouse as yours. Is that fair?"

"No, sir," Harry replied. "I don't know how much rent is, but I do know it's more than a Galleon a month. That wouldn't even cover food for a day."

"Alright then, five Galleons a month and you will spend two hours a day fixing the rock wall that is broken in the garden. Is that acceptable?"

Harry nodded. "I guess so, sir. Thank you."

"You're welcome, 'Arry, but if you don't stop calling me sir, I'll make you wish Voldemort finished what he started in that graveyard."

Harry noticed Fleur and her mother both gasping before launching into a cacophony of screamed threats and questions about Mr. Delacour's sanity. Harry swore he even saw the beginnings of Fleur transforming before she caught herself, but in all the commotion, Harry noticed Jacques tipping his head ever so slightly after closely scrutinizing Harry's reactions.

He knew Mr. Delacour was looking for something, and whatever it was, Harry had passed the test. He didn't like it, but he also recognized in the tip of the head, a certain respect.

In the midst of the two French Veelas still yelling and Harry watching Mr. Delacour, nobody noticed the youngest Veela in the house gingerly coming out of the hallway into the open room.

"Why is everyone yelling?" she asked in French, catching them by surprise.

Harry looked over and saw someone whom he vaguely recognized. He had to admit to himself that she was breathtaking. She looked somewhat different than Fleur, but had that same ethereal beauty that both Fleur and her mother. . . .

It hit him. "Gabrielle?" he asked.

Everything but her eyes froze as Harry leaned forward to say hi.

"ARRY!"

POOF!

Clothes, flesh, and feathers were everywhere as Gabrielle repeated the same incident as her sister.

Poor Harry was mortified as he looked on. First, he noticed the gorgeous Veela standing still. Then, the hallway was littered with clothes as said gorgeous Veela stood before him naked as the transformation began.

At the same moment, Harry was hit with all of Gabrielle's Veela magic.

In that split second, he remembered someone hanging on his arm, turned away, and closed his eyes, even though his heart began to race and his body dumped pheromones into his system, and the air.

"Impressive. . . and appreciated." Mr. Delacour said to Harry. Fleur and Ms. Delacour jumped out of their seats and ran across the room.

"Bloody hell she's strong!" Harry said through clenched teeth as he continued to fight the attraction.

A high pitched scream told Harry that Gabrielle had come back to her senses. The desire to bed her disappeared completely.

Both wizards heard a 'whoosh' as feathers went everywhere, they turned on reflex just in time to see the young Veela running down the hall, already shifting out of her avian form.

Harry couldn't help but notice that Gabrielle now had a very nice bum.

He closed his eyes tightly. "That was probably something I should have never seen," he mumbled.

"You?" Mr. Delacour spat out. "I'm her damn father. That makes both daughters that I've. . . seen." He shuddered. "A man never wants to see 'is grown daughter naked."

"Froissé!" he cried out.

The house-elf appeared out of thin air.

Mr. Delacour wasted no time. "Alcohol, lots of it. In a glass. A big glass."

He looked over at Harry. "Two glasses. Bring the bottle."

An hour and a three quarters of the bottle later Mr. Delacour was still trying to drown the memories, as was Harry. The two witches came back and had a drink with them, though they mainly laughed at the two wizards.

Even so, plans were made for Harry and Fleur to go to the French version of the Ministry of Magic and give testimony to what they saw in the UK.

A while later, Harry was shown his new room downstairs, though he needed Fleur's help to get to it.

It had been his first time drinking.

"So, 'Arry, zhink my sister is pretty?"

Harry muttered something that sounded an awful lot like "evil witch," making Fleur laugh.

She helped him undress and get into bed, then headed back upstairs as Harry pondering the day, mad at himself for not withstanding Fleur's ability to throw his entire world into chaos with just one look or word. He knew what destiny lay ahead. Why couldn't he put everything else aside? Why couldn't he put her aside?

In his inebriated state, he could be honest with himself. He knew exactly what he was going to become; a monster that hunted and killed for the pleasure of revenge. He was going to master the Dark Arts and become one of darkest wizards to have ever set foot in Britain. If Voldemort marked him as his equal, then Harry was going to become it, or his better.

Someplace he remembered reading, *In vino veritas*. "In wine, truth." Well, it wasn't exactly wine, but he couldn't hide from the truth; he had set a path to the Dark Arts and there was no way he wanted Fleur to see this journey.

Harry fell asleep with Sirius's advice ringing in his ears. "Don't lead her on, Harry. Don't lead her on."

But for some reason a quiet voice, deep within Harry kept protesting, I'm not!

A/N For those who really care about this kind of stuff:

Zekānōt: Hebrew transliteration literally meaning old women, but in context it can (and does here) elders (female). Thus, it is the council of Veela elders.

Gegenumenou: Alright, I struggled with this one and am still not sure if the parsing is correct, but anyway, it is the perfect passive participle feminine genitive of the Greek word for "come to be." hence, it is her "becoming."

A/N 2 Gabrielle's age. I think I said (at least I hope I did), that I am aging Gabrielle to be one year younger than Harry by virtue of this being an AU story. As for her becoming a full legal Veela adult, my rationale is that when a Veela's transformation kicks in, it pushes them straight from child to adult in a matter of a couple weeks. Such changes also affect the brain, finishing the formation of the frontal lobe, which is usually not completed until late teens/early twenties. Thus, she has the ability to think like a nineteen or twenty year old in just a few weeks, but remember, ability does not equate to experience, as she will find out.

A/N 3 I believe I've responded to most of the reviews by PM this time, but I wanted to say "thank you" to everyone who reviewed. The last chapter was the most reviewed chapter after chapter 1.

FYI - Next chapter we find out who survived the Burrow attack.

PLEASE REVIEW?

A/N According to Pottermore, the British Magical world never moved to the metric system. In this chapter a reference to "weighing a quarter on average," means two stone, or 28 pounds.

Also – reading through this just before posting it, I am suddenly unhappy with it, as I feel there is too much telling and not enough showing. But it's been a couple weeks since I've posted a chapter and I don't want to keep you all waiting any longer. Drop me a review and tell me what you think.

The beta'd chapter is now up. (if you find any mistakes, please send them on to me!)

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## CHAPTER TEN

### OUTCOMES

Harry woke up with searing headache, though, this time, it had nothing to do with his scar. The source of this headache was two-fold; a result of copious amounts of alcohol and lying awake half the night, his emotions pulling him in opposite directions over Fleur.

The former was easy to solve, at least in the long term. He'd stick to butterbeer and wine. The latter however, wasn't so easy.

Harry rolled over in bed and moaned. "I am never doing that again."

He fought the queasy feeling and let his mind drift, hoping to ignore the hangover. . .

. . . Before Fleur, it was simple. He was "The Boy Who Lived," not that he cared about title, but the reality behind it had centered his life; he would always find and be found by Voldemort until, one day, one killed the other. Harry didn't need a prophecy to tell him that. The day Hermione, Ron, and he saved the Philosopher's stone, he knew where his life would lead . . . and to whom.

But it sure as hell wasn't a blond haired, blue-eyed French witch, nor was it lying in a bed in France daydreaming about her. What beautiful dreams they were; he had captured her heart and abandoned all that lay behind him in Britain. Harry would live his life



and every day his greatest challenge would be making Fleur laugh and giggle and blush as they grew old together, raising a family where every child was loved; there wasn't even a damn closet under the stairs, let alone a lock on one.

The dreamed future was perfect, but at what point would the current reality destroy it? The prophecy was real and he couldn't run from his destiny—from his nightmare. The hellish vision broke through his enchanted daydream every time: a land once fair now lying in smoke and ruin as Harry looked on over the bodies of those he slew; some nameless place becoming a field of retribution for the killing grounds that had become Hogwarts. This future ended with Harry reaching into his magical core and releasing it in one final murderous explosion, taking Voldemort with him into whatever blackened afterlife remained for the two Dark Lords. There was no mucking about in this future; Harry always ended up a Dark Lord in order to exact the revenge promised against Voldemort on account of the growing number of dead bodies that had once been his friends.

"Hmpht." He took a deep breath, calming himself and willing the gagging to go away.

He so wanted the daydream, but knew the nightmare was his future – and he had to walk it alone. So, why then, was he unable to command his thoughts and feelings away from Fleur? Why was he being driven by something deep within himself to reach for something else that he knew should have been there his whole life—but wasn't until . . . when? Until he lay in a cave and Fleur wrapped her body over his, reaching out to him through her magic to protect him and replacing his nightmares with dreams of a blond-haired angel.

A smile spread across his face at the memory of the dreams.

What dreams they were – Fleur and Harry on a beach, the wind blowing, and no one around for miles as Fleur's ministrations gradually grew more and more intimate. How many times last night did he think about taking all his Galleons from his vault and making that dream become real? They could run away from it all, abandoning everything . . . but the prophecy.

Half the night last night, the two futures chased each other round and round in his inebriated brain until Harry seriously thought about Obliviating himself, just to get some rest.

It was no wonder he had a headache this morning, or felt like he was going to—

Harry forced himself out of bed and made it to the bathroom just in time to vomit in the bathtub. He shook his head, retrieved his wand, and cleaned up the mess before showering.

The rest of the morning wasn't any more enjoyable, either. He spent most of it at the edge of the Delacour property, about a hundred yards from the house, rebuilding the rock fence that surrounded the estate. The section he was working on had to be cleared of the loose river-rock, each one weighing a quarter on average, before it could be rebuilt. Harry set to work on the fence after a trip into town for cement powder. He did however, use magic to wet and stir the cement, but other than that it just felt right to put in the physical effort.

Fleur came to get him a little before lunch so he could clean up. They ate on the back patio. Harry spent the afternoon with Fleur, exploring the property and going into town for clothes. Dinner was eaten in the informal dining room again and Harry spent the evening in his apartment, studying late into the night on Horcruxes, Dark Arts, and even looking through a few of the English books on the shelves, including anthologies written by Percy Shelley.

This became the pattern of his life for the next few weeks, with the exception that he sometimes spent the afternoons on wand-work if he came across a spell that couldn't be practiced in his downstairs apartment. Of course, he was smart enough to wait until Fleur wasn't around to practice anything considered dark, which was pretty much everything he was doing now.

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Two days later Harry was sitting in a chair on the patio having lunch with Fleur and her mother again. Gabrielle was still in bed, suffering through her transformation. Harry hadn't seen her since that first night, though Fleur said it would be just a few days longer before she could walk around without pain.

Speaking of pain—

"Ouch!" Harry mumbled as he reached for his glass.

"A little sore, 'Arry?" Fleur asked.

"Yeah, since we didn't have Quidditch this year, I'm not quite used to the physical work."

"That's something I don't understand," Mrs. Delacour began. "If Quidditch is played on a broom, 'ow is it such a physical workout?"

Harry remembered thinking the same thing after his first Quidditch practice. "Do you fly on a broom often, Mrs. Delacour?"

"Not really. I don't have much need anymore. Obviously I 'ave used them in the past."

"When you were on a broom and you wanted to go higher, you pulled up on the broom right?"

"Oui."

"And when you wanted to go left or right, you would lean that way and pulled the broom in the direction at the same time – or push it down when you wanted to land, correct?"

"That is correct, but it didn't take much effort."

"It doesn't, not when you flying normally. But if you're going all out and have to turn on a knut, it takes a lot of upper-body control and what's called core-strength to manipulate a broom at those speeds without falling off. So, if you're a Chaser, your having to both throw the Quaffle and avoid the Bludgers. Seekers have to be able to change directions at top speeds while fighting off the other Seeker. Otherwise, if you're following another Seeker who is doing, say, a Wronski Feint, you end up planting yourself in the ground like the Irish Seeker found out last year. You have to be very strong at the speeds they fly.

"Is that why Krum looked so good in 'is shirts?" Fleur teased.

"I guess," Harry answered, before realizing that she was trying to interject a little humor. "How did he look in his trousers?"

He had a good laugh at the look on Fleur's face, but before he could continue to take the mickey out of her, a fluttering of wings interrupted them.

"Hedwig!" Harry reached out to the owl as it landed on the table, hooted, and jumped onto Harry's arm, nipping him on the ears in a show of affection.

Harry took a few seconds to make sure his owl was okay, before taken the letter from it.

"Stand back on the table girl, so I can use both hands."

Hedwig hopped back down to the table and Harry untied the letter.

"YES!"

"What?" both Delacour veelas asked in surprise. Harry almost laughed when he realized Mrs. Delacour was still holding on to the table, her knuckles turning white.

"It's Sirius! He, Remus, and Charlie are still alive! So is Tonks!"

Tears of joy threatened to overflow and Harry had a hard time reading anymore of the letter. "I can't believe it . . . how did . . . ?" He tried blinking a few times to clear them, but it wasn't helpful.

So much for clamping the lid down on my emotions.

Fleur ran her fingers through the back of his hair. "Do you want me to read it to you 'Arry?"

He didn't get a chance to answer as Hedwig snatched the letter out of his hands with her beak and fluttered over to Fleur.

"Hello, are you okay?" Fleur asked, taking the letter and giving the owl a little of her lunch. "If you're done nipping at 'Arry, our Owlery is at the top of that building over there." She pointed to a building next to the house.

The owl nipped at Fleur lovingly and flew off to the spot she pointed at.

"Sirius says to not us 'edwig as she is too easy to spot," Fleur said, scanning the letter, "much like last year. He wants to come visit sometime zhis summer if it's okay with my parents."

Mrs. Delacour nodded. "Is this the Sirius Black that was accused of those murders 'e didn't commit?"

"Yes, Maman, and 'Arry's godfather, and the same person that helped save a bunch of lives at 'Ogwarts, and—"

"It's okay, Mon Fille, I take your word that he's a good wizard. I was just making sure I was remembering the right person. Of course he can stay if he comes."

"Thank you, Mrs. Delacour." Harry answered, "I guess I should find a way to send a message back to him."

"You don't 'ave to," Fleur said. "Listen to the rest of the letter. 'Someone else will send Pig to you soon and you can reply with 'im. Hope you're doing better in France and remember what we talked about at the Leaky Cauldron."

She folded the letter and put it back into the envelope before giving it to Harry. "You feel better, no?"

He tenderly held the envelope, savoring the news. "I can't believe their live. . . I thought they'd all be dead."

He excused himself a minute or so later and escaped into his apartment for the afternoon.

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Fleur and her mother watched him leave in silence.

"How are you two doing?"

"Pardon?"

Fleur's mother shook her head. "Nice try. I taught you how to read facial expressions and body language. Every time 'Arry walks into a room you tense up and he's uncomfortable sitting next to you, but when you run your fingers through his hair or take his hand, he relaxes almost as if he's taken by your veela magic."

"You don't think that's what I'm doing, do you?" Fleur asked a little defensively.

"Of course not."

"So if you know everything then, why ask me?" Fleur questioned petulantly, with a look to match.

"You are my daughter. If I see something wrong, I worry. When you have a daughter that you love as much as I love you, you'll understand."

That took the fight out of Fleur. "Sorry, Maman. I guess, the answer is, 'I don't know.' When we were in England, all I could think about was getting here so I could talk to you about him. Now, I wish we were back in England. It all seemed so much easier there."

"What did you want to talk to me about?"

"I don't think it matters now."

"Why not?"

Fleur closed her eyes. "I've already lost my heart to him."

The only response Fleur received was a slight smirk that she saw a few seconds later when she looked back at her mother.

"But I don't know if he feels the same way for me."

Fleur's mother reached over and laid her hand on Fleur's. "I think he feels quite a bit for you. You've noticed how protective of you he is, especially when we go into town."

"He's protective of everyone and that's part of the problem. 'Arry is the type of wizard that would throw himself in front of a Killing Curse for someone he cares about."

"Is that so bad?" her mother asked.

"When there's a war happening and his friends are in the middle of it? When there's an active prophecy that 'Arry will fight against Voldemort and one of them will die? Yes, it is very bad, Maman."

"Ahh, but that's also part of who he is and probably part of what attracted you to him. If it changed, he would be different and I don't think you'd see him in the same way."

"Great," Fleur said sarcastically.

"I've also noticed that he seems hesitant around you, almost afraid, though not quite. Do you know why that would be?"

It was a topic Fleur didn't want to discuss, but who else could she go to for help? Her cousins would be more interested to learn if she had done Harry, rather than what she did too him. As much as she loved her Papa, this wasn't something she really wanted to talk about with him. Gabrielle was not yet experienced enough to understand, though in a couple more years that'd change – another topic Fleur didn't want to think about right now. The only person she could really talk to was her mother. With that decided, Fleur pushed on.

"I think I might. Remember what I told you the morning I came home?"

"Not really. I was too worried about you to think about anyone or anything else."

"I wonder how many times that has happened to him," Fleur mumbled.

"What was that?"

"Nothing. Do you remember 'Arry telling you about the morning we Portkeyed here?"

"Oui."

"He left out the part where we were flying directly over the battle and 'Arry and I were casting curses from his broom—"

"Fleur! Why would—"

"You weren't there! You have no idea what it was like!"

Her mother thought about it for a second and nodded for Fleur to go on.

"The house we were staying at was his best friends' house. The father and six siblings, including his best friend were killed the first night at 'Ogwarts. The night we Portkeyed here, 'arry and I saw his best friend's mother killed. She was the closest thing he ever had to a mother."

Fleur's mother shook her head, looking down at her hands now in her lap.

"I convinced 'Arry to fly to a safe place and take the Portkey with me—"

"TELL ME you didn't use your veela magic to do that!"

"NO MAMAN, NOW STOP INTERRUPTING!"

Fleur took a few deep breaths to calm herself. "Sorry for yelling. This is hard enough, please don't interrupt me."

Her mother reached over and took Fleur's hand again. "I won't, I promise."

Fleur nodded and waited a few more seconds before she could build up enough courage to continue. "I did something worse. Just before the Portkey activated, Harry let go of it. He wanted to go back to the battle to save what was left of the people he calls family. I jumped on him and pushed the Portkey against his neck as it activated.

"We landed here and both fell to the ground. I got up first. When Harry stood and faced me, I . . . I slapped him – hard – across the face. I was scared that he was going to go back and get himself killed, that I was going to lose him, even if he did survive."

Fleur couldn't stay seated any longer, so she got up and gestured for her mother to walk with her.



"Have you explained that to him?" her mother asked as she took Fleur's hand in hers.

They walked into the garden.

"Oui, but the next day, I reached up to touch his cheek and he. . . he flinched." Fleur choked back the emotions. "He flinched like he thought I was going to hit him again. I knew his relatives didn't treat him right, but I never thought it was that bad." She stopped to face her mother. "Why did I have to hit him? Why did I act like that? I have never done that before."

"You were scared. I can't condone what you did. I've always believed that if a witch doesn't want her husband to hit her, then she shouldn't hit her husband either, but that doesn't change the fact of how you were feeling at the time."

Fleur started back down the path. "Anyway, that's probably what you see and I don't know how to fix it. I've never cared for someone like this. I've never felt this deeply. I don't even know what to call it."

"I may," her mother hinted.

"Don't say it's love, please?"

"Why? Are you afraid of being in love?" her mother asked, gazing out over the ocean in the distance as they walked.

"No, yes, I don't know."

"Hmm. That clears it up."

Fleur gave her a small laugh and stopped walking as they came upon the newly repaired fence. She dropped her mother's hand and reached out to the wall that Harry had been fixing, running her fingers across the stone. "He's doing it by hand. The only time I see him using magic is to conjure water or stir the goop that he is using. Why would he do that? If he used magic, he'd almost be done. It'll take him all summer this way."

"I can't answer that, but those are the little mysteries that make relationships interesting. Have you asked him?"

Fleur shook her head. "No, I'm afraid that there's a story behind it that'll cause him too much pain. He seems to have a lot of those."

Her mother leaned against a part of the wall that Harry had finished a few days ago. "Listen to me. Some things happen in a wizard's life that he must keep secret. I've learned that from your father. After the first war, he never talked about what happened. I still know only scant details. It seems 'Arry has many similar stories. If you really care for him, then you also have to show him that he can trust you to tell you the stories – without you overreacting."

Fleur quirked an eyebrow at her mother. "So how are you doing with that, Mademoiselle veela?"

"Moi?"

They both laughed.

"I'm still working on it," she finally answered, "but that doesn't change anything. He needs to be able to trust you."

"Yeah, have you heard his stories though? He fought a sixty-foot basilisk, with a sword. How is a protective veela not supposed to overreact to that?"

"You're – you're serious, aren't you? A basilisk?"

Fleur grinned at her mother and started walking again. "I saw the memory in a Pensieve. He was only twelve at the time."

"TWELVE?" Apolline Delacour's voice shot through three octaves.

"See what I mean about overreacting? And yeah, twelve. He faced it alone while his best friend's little sister was dying a few feet away."

"I see what you meant the other day about him not being a young boy."

They continued in silence, eventually making the circuit and coming back to the house in the late afternoon. The meeting at the Ministry was set for Friday of the following week.

X O X O X O X

"Arry? Wake up 'Arry." Fleur came into his room and sat on his bed, speaking in a sing-song voice. "Arry, it's time to wake up."

Harry rolled over and hid beneath the covers.

Fleur smiled and slid them back down. Seeing his eyes still closed, she reached out and drew her fingertips across his cheek. "Arry, we 'ave to go to the Ministry today with Papa."

He moaned.

"Staying up late? Is there something I need to know? You're not taking my gorgeous veela sister for midnight strolls in the garden, are you?"

Harry rolled back over and gave Fleur his best "are you serious?" look. She started to laugh.

"I haven't even seen her since the first night." He shuddered to her amusement. "I stayed up 'till the early morning reading." He pointed to the books on the nightstand and gave her a sad smile. "Hermione would be proud of me."

Fleur heard the hurt in his voice, but had no idea what to do about it. She settled for sitting on the bed and reading the book titles, recognizing a few. They were classics written by both wizards and Muggles, but she was surprised that her father had a couple Muggle autobiographies in the house, including one by an American she'd never heard of before.

"I'm impressed, there's not a Quidditch book to be found."

Harry lifted another book off the bed and handed it to her with a smirk. "I can't read French so I just look at the pictures." The smirk turned into a grin as he sat up.

Fleur noticed his facial expressions, the skin around the eyes was relaxed and the smile was more genuine, the set of his shoulders and position of his arms indicating openness. Hoping that maybe they could get beyond whatever it was that still stood between them, she offered her translation services. "The title is: The One-hundred

Best-Ever Quidditch Players. Maybe I'll come down and read zhis to you one night before you go to sleep."

His body language changed immediately. She watched as he almost jumped at the chance before catching himself, mumbling something incoherent and getting out of bed, heading into the bathroom.

She waited, not wanting Harry to see any ill emotions. But as soon as the bathroom door clicked shut, she slammed the book down on the bed so hard it to bounce back up almost waist level. Fleur paid it no mind as she stormed out of the room, frustrated and upset at herself – and Harry. Had he not forgiven her yet? What if he never did? What if he never got over it?

X O X O X O X

Standing in front of the mirror, now showered and almost dressed, Harry noticed that he was beginning to fill out a little more in the chest and arms. It wasn't too perceptible and the shirts he wore covered it, but working with rocks weighing two and three stone was starting to give him a little bulk and definition.

He put on his shirt and light summer robe that he bought with Fleur's fashion help and thought again about the decision not to cut his hair. He wasn't sure why, but for some reason he'd decided to let it grow. Maybe it was just another example of the minor things in life that really shouldn't bother him anymore in the short time he had left.

Harry waved his wand over his hair to make sure it was dry and tried to tame it with a brush. At least the length weighed it down enough that he didn't have hair sticking up in the back anymore.

He exited the apartment, walking through the hallway, past the library and second downstairs bedroom, and then taking the stairs to meet Mr. Delacour and Fleur in the informal dining room.

"Good morning, 'Arry," Mr. Delacour welcomed him. "Thanks again for coming with me to the Magical Government today.

"Bon matin, Monsieur Delacour, Avec plaisir," Harry said as he sat at the table.

He couldn't help but notice Fleur's surprise and the small smile. Her father called a house elf and Harry ordered breakfast.

"I'm glad to see you're taking an interest in the French language," Mr. Delacour said once the elf left, "but, we say bonjour until it is evening, then it's bonsoir."

"Oh."

"Don't worry 'Arry," her father continued. "There are differences like that in every language. French 'as so many idioms that is difficult to keep track of them sometimes. I take it you found the French grammar book in the library?"

"Yes sir."

"'Arry, please. I have enough gray hair as it is. If you keep calling me sir, I'm afraid the rest will turn gray. I think my wife 'as already said that you do not need to be so formal around us."

"Sorry, Mr. Delacour, I'm not use to addressing adults informally."

"That's okay, 'Arry. Let's talk about what's going to happen today."

Half an hour later, Harry stepped out of the floo into a very large hall, almost falling to the floor before Fleur caught him.

"I zhink I see why you prefer to fly on your broom rather than Portkey or Floo," she teased.

The fire flashed again and Mr. Delacour stepped out of the Floo into the Main Hall that looked to be three times as large as the Great Hall at Hogwarts and at least five stories high.

Harry turned from him to look around, amazed at the marble floor, walls, and ceiling. Massive tapestries hung from their holders, stacked two high across both walls that ran lengthwise down the hall. The eight outside (four to each side) and four middle (two to each side) tapestries were royal blue, with a red rectangle as its border and a white stripe running from the top left corner to the bottom right. In the middle was a bright, gold Fleur-de-lis. The same design was imprinted in a fifty by one hundred foot section in the middle of the marble floor.

The other tapestries held designs and pictures of French origins that were lost on Harry. He craned his neck back to look at the ceiling and found a painting of a wizard, a veela, and a giant moving across it, in deep discussion.

He felt a hand brush against his and looked down to notice Fleur standing next to him. Before he could stop himself, Harry reached for her hand. Fleur took it quickly as she gestured towards the ceiling with her other hand.

"Those are the founding members of the Council of Magicals. It was the first magical government in France, starting at the turn of the last millennium. The council ruled until the first Muggle French Republic. The giants sided with the Muggle king and the wizards and veelas sided with the Muggle republic. In 1792, the wizards and veela participated in the Reign of Terror and the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy was virtually forgotten. The next year, it extended to the wizarding world. The wizards and veelas cleared France of Giants. It is the reason the Giants hate wizards that side with common Muggles and probably why they fought for Voldemort in the last war."

Harry had stopped looking at the ceiling, taken in by the gorgeous, intelligent witch that had been holding his hand. "I had no idea things went back that far. I mean, I always thought it was strange that the giants would side with Voldemort even though they weren't Pureblood wizards."

"There's a lot of 'istory behind the wars, 'Arry. Didn't your 'lstory of Magic professor teach you that?"

"Professor Binns? The ghost? Most of us usually fell asleep in his class."

She rolled her eyes, but the effect was lost in her smile. "Zhen let me educate you!"

"The French wizards tried to meet and constitute a new government after the first one fell, but they were too selfish. One wizard murdered another at the third meeting of the Council of the Magical Republic in 1804. The whole council – over ninety wizards – turned their wands on each other. The veelas tried to stop it with their

magic, drawing the attention to themselves, but it only made it worse. The veela magic was so strong that in the wizard's 'atred, they fought each other to claim domination, then turned against the veelas, raping and killing most of them.

Since then, veela and 'umans have never been under the same government in France. The wizards have made overtures but the Zekānōt have a very long memory and oppose it. The Magical Government of old is just a memory now."

Harry looked back up at the ceiling. Strange, he thought, I never enjoyed a history lesson this much from Hermione. But an implicit moral to the lesson wasn't lost on him either. The wizarding world in general had problems, not just Britain, and this wasn't the first time that it had led to war either.

Bu what good was that lesson for him? He really had no control over what was happening. He was just another nameless, faceless person that would barely be remembered in history when the current British war was recounted.

I'm frightfully full of cheer today, aren't I?

"I have never heard of the Zekānōt. What are they?" Harry asked, hoping for a distraction.

Fleur looked down from the ceiling, seemingly lost in her own thoughts now. "'Who', not 'what'. They are the veela Elder council. Since the veela 'as an avian nature as well as a human nature, veela stay in their flock. You would call it a clan, no? We flock together and the elders of their then make up the council. The flocks and the council have been stable for three millennia. The Zekānōt are the ones who decide which veela go through the Gegenumenou making them full veela.

"What in the world is the Gegenemememum- u."

Fleur laughed. "Gegenumenou? The Zekānōt took control of deciding which veelas get to become "full" veela in—

"What?" Harry asked, stunned. "You mean you could be full veela if someone else just decided you should be?" He spat out the last few words, disgusted at what he just heard. People in his homeland

were killing each other over being Purebloods and here, his. . . Fleur had been rejected by her people. His anger seethed.

"It's not that simple, 'Arry. There are many veela who are happy and don't want to go through the ceremony, though it is very seldom turned down if offered. It is a great privilege to be asked to go through the Gegenumenou. There are also many great things about being a full veela."

Harry shook his head, overwhelmed at the education he was getting. "What's so good about being a full veela compared to a part veela?"

Fleur was quiet for a few seconds, looking at the tapestries before she began. "Think of it like this. I have my magic, which is a mix of veela and 'uman. Every veela is born with that. Now, if you go through the ceremony, it's like taking a potion that wakes up another part of your magic. Every veela, down to the eighth generation, has the magic and the ability to become a full veela if the Zekānōt allows it."

"But why wouldn't they?"

"Were you at the World Cup last year, 'Arry?"

"Yes."

"What 'appened to you when the veela started dancing?"

Harry blushed and Fleur grinned widely. "Exactly, imagine tens of thousands of full veela. The 'uman race would cease within four centuries – they would all be linked to the veela, that's if they all didn't kill each other off fighting for a veela's love."

"Oh."

"That's why there are usually only seven to nine thousand full veela at any one time and around fifty flocks. The leaders become part of the Zekānōt.

"Flock leaders?" Harry asked, looking around trying to figure out what happened Mr. Delacour. He took some comfort that Fleur didn't seem to worry.



"The Zekānōt are more than just elders. They are the flock leaders, which make them the strongest of their flock. When they become part of the Zekānōt, even more of the veela magic awakens."

A nasty grin crossed her face. "You've seen me mad. If you were at the World Cup, you've seen just the beginning of an angry full veela. Be warned, you never want to see a member of the Zekānōt angry."

She had Harry's full attention again. He stopped looking for her father and his curiosity got the better of him. "I guess Hermione rubbed off on me a little too much, because I really want to know why, now."

"You've seen veela throw fire right? Now imagine a veela that can still take to the air and hurl fireballs infused with magic that are three and four the times the size of what you saw the full veelas throw. There are some veela stories that say the destruction of Atlantis was caused by their king killing a flock of veelas. The flock leader arrived to find them dead and became angry."

"I thought you said veelas came from young women being murdered in Eastern Europe or Russia or somewhere?"

"I said zhat is where some of our legends come from, not where veela originated, but enough of veela culture and French history. 'Ave you thought about school this year?"

"Not really," Harry said. "By the way, where is your father?"

"He was met at the floo and taken away to an emergency meeting, he should be back shortly. Come; let's go to his office."

Still hand in hand, Fleur led Harry to the elevators at the end of the hall. They took it down to the fifth floor and exited in a room with so many wards, charms, and physical partitions that Harry started feeling claustrophobic as he walked through the center of the room to one of the three offices on the other side.

Fleur put her hand on the door and held it there for a second before it opened. "Papa has it set so zhat when he's in the building, Maman, Gabrielle, or I can get into his office," she explained.

Harry went in and found it somewhat spacious, with a desk about the same size as Dumbledore's at one end of the room. At the other end was a small fireplace with chairs and tables situated around it. Fleur led him to that end of the room and sat down.

"Arry, you do not need to go to school. You can hire a tutor for most of your subjects. I can even tutor you in Charms and Transfiguration if you want. Beauxbatons tests earlier than Hogwarts. I already finished my Seventh Year tests and scored the highest grade possible in both subjects."

"I don't know," Harry said cautiously, the dream of him on a beach with Fleur began to dance in his thoughts. "Like I said, I haven't really thought about it. I know I need to learn, certain things" – he hoped she didn't hear the slight hesitation – "but I haven't really thought that far."

What's the use? He wondered as the nightmare chased the daydream away again.

The door opened and Mr. Delacour walked in. "Sorry to leave you in the Main Hall."

"Is everything okay Papa?" Fleur asked.

"No, but it's nothing we didn't already know. Anyway, you were supposed to be meeting Philippe and Anselme, but since we're late, we're all going to meet in the Pensieve tenue chambre – excuse me, the Pensieve holding room."

Harry and Fleur followed him out of the office and back to the elevators, which they took to the second floor. When the doors opened, Harry saw a normal hallway with three doors on the right side, but only one door on the left side, which was the one Mr. Delacour led them to. Harry stepped into the room after Fleur and found it decorated almost to the point of being extravagant.

"They've realized that when people are comfortable, they are able to give memories with the most texture and detail," Mr. Delacour said when he noticed Harry looking around at the furniture.

"Sit down, Arry, let me introduce you. This is the Deputy Minister of Security – Foreign."

"Hello, Harry. It is very nice to meet you. Please call me Philippe or if that is too informal for you, Minister Philippe is fine."

"It's nice to meet you, Minister Philippe."

"And this is Anselme," Mr. Delacour continued. "Anselme is the Deputy Ministry of Security – Domestic. I believe it's almost the same position that your Madame Bones 'olds."

"Zhat ees yes," Anselme answered. "I am 'appy to meet you 'Arry. There ees much to know from you. If you are comfortable weeth naming heem Minister Philippe, name me Minister Anselme."

Harry bit his tongue before he corrected the Minister on his English. He realized just how much it must have hurt Mr. Delacour to hear him mangle French.

"It is nice to meet you too, Minister Anselme."

Fleur gave both deputy ministers a hug and then sat down on the couch with Harry, taking his hand again. Harry noticed both men fighting their own grins as they quickly looked up at Mr. Delacour.

"Alright, Harry," Minister Philippe said. "The two young ladies in the room with us are the best Integrative Memory Workers in France. Have you ever utilized a Pensieve before?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good," he answered. "These ladies are going to copy your memories, place them in a Pensieve, and view them. Then, they will synchronize them with anchors—don't asked, I have no idea what it means."

Harry laughed, as did the two young ladies.

"Once they do that, if you would be so kind, we would like you and Fleur to step into the memory with us and give us a commentary."

"Uncle Phil – Minister Philippe," Fleur corrected herself. "I'm not sure zhat's such a good idea. What happened that night was traumatic and—"

"And they need to know," Harry cut in. "I'm not sure if you need both of us, so Fleur doesn't have to see it again, but since this has pretty much been my life I can probably give you more than enough commentary myself."

Somewhere in Harry's response, he noticed that Fleur had withdrawn her hand and crossed her arms, but he paid it no mind as the two IMW workers stepped forward and began their work of retrieving the memories.

Three hours later, the two workers stepped out of the Pensieve. While both of them had very pretty olive skin, they were currently as white as a ghost. After locking eyes with Harry for a good ten seconds, the taller one turned and spoke to the Ministers.

"The integration is done and is in excellent quality. If you need us for anything else, we'll be at our desks."

The assistant or at least she seemed like the assistant to Harry, began to leave, but the other twenty-something witch stopped in front of him. "If you ever have a desire to remove those memories permanently from your mind, come to me. I will clean out every one of them. I can replace them completely, or leave you the knowledge, as if you read it in a book so that you know what happened, but don't have the first 'and memory. I will not charge you for the work either."

She waved to the other worker and they both walked out of the office.

Minister Philippe glared at the retreating backs of the workers as he spoke. "Harry, I don't know what's in that Pensieve, but what you were just offered costs on the order of fifteen thousand Galleons – mainly because it is very illegal, except in the most extreme cases and then, only with ICW approval."

He faced Harry. "To offer to remove your memories in front of Anselme alone could get her arrested and she knows that. To offer it for free. . . . What I'm trying to say is, you do not have to revisit the memory."

"I don't understand, 'Obliviate,' is heard almost as much in England as 'Accio,'" Harry said.

Minister Anselme shook his head, "Non, 'Arry, zhat not what she offered. She said 'remove' not 'Obliviate.'"

He suddenly understood. Instead of blowing up the memory, leaving bits and pieces behind like a bad dream that cannot be remembered but still felt, she would literally remove the memory so he would never have to feel it, think about it, or see it again.

If only life was that easy.

"I'm sorry, 'Arry, but we are on a bit of a tight schedule," Mr. Delacour reminded him. "I think Minister Philippe needs an answer about viewing the memory."

Harry thought about it for a second and then concluded that he needed to see the fully restored memory. Maybe, if he were lucky, he'd be able to see something that would help him the next time he met Voldemort.

"Thank you sir," he said to Minister Philippe, "but if you need commentary, I guess I'm the one that provide it the best."

X O X O X O X

Fleur was sitting at the table in the private room of the restaurant, gazing at a menu and trying to figure out why Harry continued to resist any attempt for her to help him. She was just trying to have him not relive what had to be the worst moments of his life, or at least those that he could remember. Instead, he dove head first into it. Why?

She listened as Uncle Philippe – not her real Uncle, but a very close friend of the family – recounting the memory to the deputy head of her school. At least they were speaking in French so 'Arry didn't have to hear it again.

Shaking her head, Fleur peeked up at Harry and noticed him quickly looking down at his own menu. What was she going to do with him? Despite what she said to her mother, Fleur knew that the word she used was exactly what was beginning to happen.

She was beginning to fall in love.

But why? Did she enjoy taking care of someone? Did she like the feeling of being older and taking control in a relationship in a way other than through her veela magic? Or was it that he presented a challenge to her?

None of those really represented love, nor did they explain what she felt.

No, this was more like . . . destiny. Fleur snorted. Destiny, like the silly fictional veela-bonds that half of the wizarding world reads about in trashy romance novels. Right.

But she wondered if something like that was possible. Not a veela bond, but rather the fates pushing them together – only to what, see her destined love die at the hands of a Dark Lord? Was that it?

Whatever it was, there was no escaping the fact that Fleur was falling in love with Harry; the way he laughed, the way she caught him looking at her at times, how he blushed, they were all things that had become so important in Fleur's life in the last two weeks – or was it since the Second Task?

Fleur decided that if she had to be honest with herself, it was probably somewhere around March that she started to fall for him.

"Zut," she whispered to herself.

X O X O X O

"Hello, my name is Professor Sirko."

Harry reached across the table and shook his hand before the professor introduced himself to everyone else.

Since three languages were represented now, English was spoken, as it was the only one everyone had in common. Fleur was pulled back to the conversation when she heard Harry's voice answering the professor from Durmstrang.

"Thank you Professor Sirko, but Krum was just as much a hero that night." He turned to the Deputy Head of Beauxbatons. "As was Fleur, they both battled Voldemort and his Death Eaters to save my life."

"And you battled to save their lives, eh?" Professor Sirko asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Why would a person do that?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"A person could walk away. Why go through the entire process? Why not grab a two-four and work on your Molson Muscle instead?"

Harry pulled his eyebrows together, confused. "I don't follow, sir."

"To put it bluntly, why didn't you get your ass out of there and forget about everyone else?"

Harry had to remember to keep control of his anger, but that didn't stop him from addressing the Professor in a clipped voice. "They saved my life, how in the ruddy hell could I have done that?"

"Is that all? Just tit for tat?"

Harry was quickly growing not to like him. "No! It was just . . . I don't know. The right thing to do. Why? Would you have just ran off?" Harry challenged, trying to stare the professor down.

After a tense few seconds, Professor Sirko nodded. "I like you, Harry."

"Pardon?" Harry was definitely confused now.

"I was late because I stopped off at the Government building and watched all the memories before I came here. I watched how you fought; the power, the intensity, I like what I saw; but wanted to know why you did what you did."

"Why should it matter? Harry asked."

"You will find, Harry, that intent is even more important than wand work. So when are you going back to Britain to fight him?"

Harry was dumbfounded, but Fleur came to his rescue. "Why do you think 'e would do a thing like that, Professor?"

"I don't know," he answered. "Why are you going to go back with him?"

The table grew silent, except for the Durmstrang professor chuckling under his breath. "Harry, you don't fight like that only to abandon your home and never go back." He gestured to Fleur. "And you don't fight like that to save your wizard only to let him go on his own back to the very place you had to save him from."

Harry was gobsmacked and could see that Fleur was as well.

The Professor continued. "Harry, I want you to come to Durmstrang. My apologies if this is in bad form," he said to everyone else, particularly the professor from Beauxbatons. "But I believe I have something at Durmstrang that Harry needs."

"What's that?" Harry interrupted.

"Me, Harry. I know what it's like to go back to your homeland seeking revenge. It's how I ended up as a Professor at Durmstrang."

"Pardon me," Minister Philippe cut in, "but I am very familiar with your 'work' in the Ukraine – including the Dark Arts you used there. I can see why you're a professor at Durmstrang."

Conversation ceased for a few minutes as the waiter came in to take orders, but even he noticed the chilly atmosphere that seemed to settle over the table in the silence. When he'd left, the Professor nodded to Minister Philippe. "I do not deny my body of work in the Ukraine, nor the methods I used. I do however; dispute Durmstrang as a Dark Arts school.

The huffs and 'hrmphs' around the table told Harry that everyone else's opinion was about the same as his.



The professor turned to Mr. Delacour. "Pardon me for being so forward, but I understand that you are married to a half-veela, correct?"

Sitting to Harry's right, Mr. Delacour stiffened at the question. Harry reached under his table and drew his wand. Whatever was about to happen, Mr. Delacour had opened his home for Harry – and he was Fleur's father.

"Why do you ask," Mr. Delacour said, his voice devoid of emotion.

"Please, I don't mean to offend. A third of Durmstrang's students are from Bulgaria. Do you happen to remember who the Bulgarian National Quidditch team's mascots are?" Professor Sirko inquired.

"veela," Mr. Delacour answered.

"Yes. Germany, Poland, the Ukraine, and a couple other countries in the area provide another fifty percent of the students. Each of those countries has a far better relationship with the veela flocks than France, wouldn't you agree?"

Minister Philippe cleared his throat. "Since you have just insulted France and inquired at quite a personal level concerning both Monsieur Potter's future and Monsieur Delacour's wife, may I suggest you get to the point rather quickly?"

"Yes," the professor continued. "I can see how that would be wise. My point is, there has never been a documented – or even rumored – case of a veela engaging in the Dark Arts. It is impossible for them as their magic is incompatible, correct?"

Heads around the table nodded. Harry was surprised to see Fleur's nodding as well, though now that he thought more, it did make sense that she knew.

"So explain then, how the school that has a third of its students from a country that idolizes veela like Bulgaria, and another half filled with students that are brought up in cultures much more accepting of veela than western Europe, can be a school of the Dark Arts?"

"That would be true," the Beauxbatons professor answered, "if the Dark Arts was about blood purity and their disgusting fallacies about

those they call 'half breeds', but the Dark Arts and bloodlines have nothing in common, except that the oldest of the Purebloods usually have dabbled, at least, in the Arts."

Professor Sirko shook his head. "A full quarter of the students that come from Bulgaria have some amount of veela in them. Usually, five to seven percent of the witches are full veela. You know as well as I do that veela are uncomfortable around those who practice the Dark Arts. It agitates their magic. So, if the school really promoted Dark Arts, why would any veela go there? Why would we have so many Bulgarian students?"

"But they have a reputation!" Harry practically yelled.

"Yes," the professor answered him. "A well cultivated one at that. We all know what happened at Hogwarts a couple weeks ago. The same thing happened at Durmstrang in the forties. After Grindewald, the Board of Governors decided that it would be a good idea to have a 'talking head' – as our last Headmaster was – so that those who wanted to know about the Dark Arts would have a place to attend and the school might be safer for being perceived as the darkest of the three major European institutions. However, what most people don't know is that we teach not just about the Dark Arts, and how to use a few of them, but also about the damage it does to the soul. How it destroys people and is never worth the path a person has to take to become proficient enough in them.

"No, I think you would find that Durmstrang takes a more 'practical' approach to the Dark Arts, but that practicality is all the way around, including how impractical it is for most people to try and wield them."

He turned to Harry. "You do need to know however, that I have used them. I was born in the Ukraine and immigrated to Canada many, many years ago along with a multitude of other Ukrainians. When the Soviet Union broke up, many of us returned. I stayed in Canada, not wanting to relocate. My parents and my much, much younger sisters moved back however. Three years ago, I received an owl that all three younger sisters were kidnapped for the sex-slave industry that the post-soviet Ukraine is known to export."

Professor Sirko took in the ministers sitting at the table. "I returned to the Ukraine and hunted down every last damned wizard that was involved. Eventually, I found my sisters, but it was too late for two of

them. They were already so addicted to potions that they died while trying to recover. My youngest sister made it, but after finding out just some of what she went through and the nightmares she still has, I often wonder if she wouldn't have been better off dying like her sisters."

He looked back at Harry. "I know the desire you have to go back to your homeland and seek revenge. I know what it's like to own a blood debt and want to collect. I also know the toll it will take on your soul, Harry. A line exists that you must not cross. I can teach you that line if you come to Durmstrang."

Harry lay in bed hours later, with a whole lot more to think about.

X O X O X O X

That next evening, Mr. Delacour threatened Harry before he went to bed.

"You will not spend time on the fence tomorrow. I didn't intend for you to literally spend two hours every day working on it."

Of course, the threat was delivered with a scowl covering a grin, so the next morning, Harry wasn't too worried about it, but he thought it wise to obey. That was how he found himself in his little sitting room to the side of his bedroom, reading a book when the sound of a knock on his door surprised him. Fleur was visiting her grandmother so Harry wasn't expecting any visitors

"Come in."

The door opened and to Harry's surprise, Mr. Delacour walked into the sitting room next to his bedroom. "'Arry, I'm headed into town today and wanted to know if you would like to come along."

Harry gave it a moment's thought before agreeing. "I would love to, si—um, I mean, yeah, I would love to."

Mr. Delacour chuckled. "Good, ready to leave then?"

"Not really. Could I have twenty minutes to take a quick shower and change?"

"That should be fine," Mr. Delacour thought aloud. "What book are you reading?"

Harry showed it to him. He was smart enough to study his Dark Art books at night when he knew he wouldn't be bothered.

"That's one scary Vulgaire," he said to Harry. "I read the entire autobiography the weekend I brought it home."

"Vulgaire?" Harry asked.

"I believe you the English phrase is 'Muggle'."

"Oh, okay, that makes sense. Yeah, he is. I had no idea there were people like this. Imagine what he could have done if he had magic?"

"We have some wizards in the French Muggle army that have gone through special forces training like that. They are a scary lot. That man you're reading about, 'oweever, is in a completely different class."

Mr. Delacour told Harry he would wait for him in the large main room of the house and left. Harry put the book down, undressed, and climbed into the shower. As the hot water flowed over his body, he thought back to all he had read about the Muggle.

The guy started out as just another kid, but after joining one of the branches of the American military and going through special training, he went with a small group of similarly trained Muggles to some small country in the far-east. The things he did there, the things that man learned, were lessons that Harry needed to include in his own plans, things such as using the geography to his benefit; always doing things differently; copying those he was trying to kill, and always, always use the back door to gain the element of surprise.\*

The more Harry thought about it, the more sense it made as well. Twice now, he had conjured snakes in battle. What would happen if he did it again? What if they knew that he would conjure a snake? What if they found a charm that would turn the snake or snakes back on him as soon as they were conjured?

Then there was the idea of being active rather than passive. Take the fight to them, rather than waiting for it to come. Harry still

couldn't believe a group of Muggles could sneak into a house full of Muggles and take one without waking anyone else up, but by the sounds of it, that's what the guy and his group did and it was very effective.

Harry shut off the shower, stepped out, and dried himself off as he continued to think about what he was reading.

Would it work for Harry? He had magic on his side so he could silence himself and whomever he was after. What would happen if Death Eaters started disappearing out of their homes in the middle of the night, never to be seen again?

Could he do that though? It's one thing to kill someone in a battle, but like that? Then again, weren't they at war already? The only difference between a battle fought which someone else started and one he began, was the fact he was able to choose the place to have it.

Dried and dressed, Harry put it behind him and went upstairs to meet Mr. Delacour, but when he got to the top of the steps, Harry froze.

"Hi, 'Arry." Gabrielle said a little shyly and blushing.

"Hi Gabrielle, are you okay now?"

"I'm getting there. You don't feel any of my magic, do you?"

"Um, no." Harry answered and blushed himself, remembering the night two weeks ago when he saw her. . . Harry blushed even more.

Gabrielle giggled. "I should apologize," she said. "You surprised me and my magic . . . exploded?"

"Ah, yeah, I guess exploded would be a good word for it."

She flashed a brilliant smile at him, still tinged with the blush in her cheeks. "Fleur and I are going to The Wizarding street and Vulgaire Paris in a few days. She thinks I'll be fully in control of my magic by then, so I promise, no more explosions!"

Harry could tell she wasn't trying to flirt. Matter of fact, he could see a whole lot of the little Gabrielle he had rescued from the lake still. The only problem was that she also had a very adult body and the sweet, cute looks she gave him, were anything but sweet and cute now.

That thought alone convinced him. "Yeah, I'd love to go with the two of you."

He would make sure he had his wand ready, and any male, wizard or Muggle, that came with twenty feet of her was going to get hexed to within an inch of his life.

"So how did you end up at our house 'Arry?"

"Fleur and I, um. . . ."

Gabrielle gasped and jumped at Harry, squeezing him in a big hug. "You're Fleur's boyfriend?"

"No, well, kind of, I guess. I don't know, ask Fleur."

The laughter from the other end of the room caught Harry's attention.

Mr. Delacour addressed Gabrielle in French before asking Harry if he was ready to leave, but he couldn't get out the door without Gabrielle hugging him again and squealing loudly about the possibility of him and Fleur.

An hour later, Harry found himself sitting across an outside table having lunch with Mr. Delacour in the Muggle town of Collioure. He had to admit, the view from the terrace enabling him to look over the bay was breathtaking.

"I want to be honest with you, 'Arry."

He put down his drink, feeling the bludger coming straight for his head.

"When you first showed up at my house, I didn't know what to think. But seeing what I did in the Pensieve Friday, and the way you've been handling yourself around the house with my daughters, I am very impressed."

"Thank you."

Mr. Delacour took a long drink, obviously preparing himself for the next part of the conversation. It made Harry even more nervous.

"Professor Sirko was right, you are going back to England, aren't you?" he asked.

Harry sighed, deeply. "Yes, sir. I can't tell you why, but I have too."

"I know why you think you have to. Fleur told my wife. Don't worry, Apolline may come across a little glib at times, but it covers a very deep, very serious veela. Your secret is safe with her. The only reason she told me is because she's worried about you."

Harry remained quiet, not knowing what to say.

"Is Fleur going back with you?"

"I'll curse her all the way back to France if she does. There's no reason for her to involve herself." Harry noticed the surprised look. "I take it you thought she would go back with me."

"I did."

"She might try. But please, Mr. Delacour, don't let her. Do everything you can to keep her here."

"Thank you, 'Arry. I do not want to see my daughter involved in a war, especially one over blood purity."

"I tried to get her to leave England before, but she kept staying around. I don't understand why, when she could come home to a place like this."

Mr. Delacour sipped from his glass before answering. "That, I think, is for you to find out for yourself."

"Then I'm doomed. I have no hope to understand witches."

"Welcome to being a wizard—or more likely, welcome to being male."

Harry grunted in amusement.

"Anyway," Mr. Delacour continued, "What I was saying was that I wasn't sure I wanted you to stay with us. I was afraid you would attract Death Eaters and I will not have my family threatened."

A ball of lead formed in Harry's stomach. "I understand, sir. If I can stay tonight, I'll find a new place tomorrow."

Mr. Delacour broke out in laughter. "'Arry, if I kicked you out of my 'ouse, do you think I'd be able to survive the wrath of two—make that three—veela?"

The ball of lead lessened, but didn't go away.

"I guess what I'm trying to say, is that I know you have no family. I know how much the war has taken from you. Last night Apolline and I agreed that we want to offer our home to you permanently, or at least until the war is over and you are able to catch up with all your schooling and get on with your life. Also, the offer isn't contingent on your relationship with my daughter."

"I. . .thanks, I guess. I really don't . . ." - he paused for a moment - "I'm sorry, Mr. Delacour. I can't accept your offer."

"Why not?"

"You know what happened to my parents, or the Weasleys? People around me die, Mr. Delacour. It's the reason I don't want Fleur to follow me back to England. It's why I am going to face Voldemort alone when the time comes."

"Alone? No, 'Arry. If you face him alone you will only assure that you will die alone. You will tell me when you are planning to face him."

"Why? So you can come across the Channel and be killed like everyone else?"

"You speak as if I have not seen war. Look back up towards my 'ouse. See the flat of that valley? October thirty-first, it will be fifteen years to the night that I watched six of my friends fall to wands held by wizards in black robes. That night, I took the lives of five Death



Eaters. Fleur was four years old and they were coming for her, 'Arry; they were coming for Fleur, my wife, and all the veelas in my wife's family that were hiding with us.

"What? Why, what did they do?"

Harry was shocked at the grin that spread across the older man's face. "My wife and the rest of her flock were trying to rally the veela to support the French government against the Death Eaters. She doesn't know that I know, but that's why she was targeted. She's a hell of a woman, 'Arry, witch and veela combined, and her daughters take after her.

"Anyway, consider the apartment downstairs yours. We'll let the current agreement continue until fall, then you're going to stop paying for the room and I don't want to hear about it, understood?"

"Yes . . . cur!" Harry said in a cheeky voice.

Mr. Delacour smiled widely. "If you're going to call me sir, I much rather you do it like that. By the way, that autobiography is a great book."

They both laughed and finished their lunch. But before they left, Mr. Delacour had a couple more surprises for Harry.

"Do you know what my job was before the last war broke out?" Mr. Delacour asked.

"No."

"I was an Apparition teacher. I asked Fleur about your magic last night and from what she told me, I think you're ready to learn how. You are going to need it when you go back."

Harry opened his mouth to thank him, but Mr. Delacour put a hand up. "There is a cost. You will tell me when you are going back to England and, if you need me, I will go with you."

Before Harry could argue he continued. "You have lived in my house now for two weeks, 'Arry. In that time, the only thing you have done to upset my wife is show her too much respect. You have treated Fleur honorably even though I know you are struggling in a

relationship. You actually resisted Gabrielle's magic on the night we will never talk about again."

Harry couldn't help but chuckle darkly.

"For all those reasons and more we have invited you to live under our roof. That means the protection I afford my wife and daughters, I now afford to you as well. I know you are your own man, 'Arry. More so than most, in fact, but please don't let your pride get you killed. If you need me, let me know.

Harry nodded his agreement, not wanting to say anything to give away the fact that he had just silently sworn that he would never tell any of the Delacour family when he was heading back across the Channel. He refused to allow death to visit this family as it had so many others.

X O X O X O X

Over the next week, Harry continued to work on the fence and read the books, including the Dark Arts books he had brought with in him, and fight his internal battle concerning Fleur. If he could just make it to the beginning of September, maybe he would go to Durmstrang. But did he want to? The answer, truthfully, was no. He wanted to stay here with Fleur.

But that was all the more reason to leave. Yet, somehow, no matter his plans nor how tentative their relationship seemed, every night he lay in bed thinking about the blond haired, blue-eyed veela that would not let his heart go.

The only change to Harry's routine, was an owl from Cho. Neville and Su Li were still together and doing well, though they worried about Neville. He was involving himself more and more in the war.

A few members of the Order had died already in skirmishes; no one Harry knew, though that didn't make it any better.

But it was the last lines of the letter that put a smile on Harry's face. Sirius and Charlie had decided to visit a courtly flower and maybe even get to see its potter in France the following week, if Harry thought it was a good idea.

He thought it was a great idea.

\*This is sourced from a real autobiography, which I will share later on. I do not want to do it now, because I don't want to associate this fic too closely with that story (it was a great Autobiography though). A few people have already guessed it in the reviews (yes, this is an edit - I forgot to add this part in). So if you are really interested, check out the reviews, those who guessed, are right).

Also - Thank you Jediprankmaster for catching the little mistake between "Obliviate" and "Obliterate." Yes, I agree, there's a BIG difference between them! That scene is quite funny with "Obliterate" however.

A/N: I am almost finished with the editing of chapter one. It should probably be posted before the next chapter is posted, speaking of which. . . The last part of March and April are very busy for me, so this story will probably not be updated again until sometime in late April or May. I have about 3 lines of the next chapter written, so it's going to take some time.

A/N 2. I've finally listened to all the criticism concerning accents. Originally, Fleur, her father, Philippe, Anselme, etc, were all going to be distinguished by how well they spoke without a French accent. However, if I'm losing your interest in the story because the accents are too hard to read through, then it's not worth it. So from here on, only the "h" will be left off accents consistently, and more accent will be placed on important words (like "leettle"). I hope that helps.

On to reviews:

There's just a couple I want to answer specifically, but to all of them – first, thanks.

For all the reviews about the transformation at the end: I almost cut that entire thread out of this chapter, but I'm glad I kept it in. POOF!

Heliosion: Some of the veela maturity plotline are downright disgusting. I clicked on a link one time after doing a google search for "Harry/Fleur." It had a eight year old sexually mature Gabrielle. . . truly disgusting. Needless to say, I started paying more attention to what links I was clicking for stories. Thanks for the compliment.

Gabrielle and Harry: (In particular Jediprankmaster and Grimjowx) Gabrielle is definitely going to be problems for a few people – but not in the way you think. Not at all in the way you think (chuckling to myself). I Really am looking forward to the chapter where she steals entire scene.

For those of you who have patiently waded through the deep emotional self-psychoanalyzing – thank you, I know it's not your favorite to read through sometimes. But it is so needed to set up the story and the characters actions/reactions.

LAST: Please review! It really does give me the sense that the story is being enjoyed – and even though I often say "this is why," know that the reviews are taken into account in the rest of the story. Often I realize I have to bring more light on a subject, or explain it a bit better.

...

- FLASHBACK -

A THAWING FROST

Fleur sat in the Great Hall, shivering from the March winds. The clinking silverware and laughing wizards faded into background noise as she thought about the previous night.

"Fleur? Did you hear what I said?" her cousin asked.

"What? Oh, I. . . ."

Why isn't he here yet? Both of his friends are sitting right over there. Then again, what am I going to do when he does show up?

"Are you sure you're okay?"

Maybe I should ask to speak with him— She jumped at the soft touch on her hand.

A similar set of eyes caught her attention across the table. "This isn't like you - what's going on?"

"I didn't sleep much."

The other blond-haired witch raised an eyebrow. "That's it?"

"Oui," Fleur answered, and pushed her breakfast around the plate. "Lack of sleep makes mornings a little difficult."

"Difficult? I think it makes you look like you're about to—"

Fleur silenced her with a glare.

"Hmpf."

Okay, almost silenced her. A few moments later, Paige crinkled her nose again at the taste of the Pumpkin Juice.

"Why do you drink it if you don't like it?"

"Why won't you tell me what's wrong?"

What could she say? She could tell Paige how he saved Gabrielle again last night, about how this time, only Gabrielle lived; how Fleur woke up and cried, wailed for the first time in years. She could mention that she had an overwhelming need to see him, to make sure he was safe.

That'd go over real well.

"So anyway, what was it you were saying?" she asked Paige.

Paige slowly shook her head. "You are the most stubborn veela I've ever met. . . . Anyway, I'm going back to Beauxbatons next week. I need to study for final exams and there's no one here to teach advanced Veela history."

"Oh . . . that makes sense, I guess. Don't know why you took those courses. Grand-mère could teach you everything we needed to know."

"Whatever; you do realize it means I can't help you prepare for the last—"

"It's okay, go back to France. . . ."

The owls caught Fleur's attention a few minutes later. The way they fluttered about the room and dropped packages on the table was . . . annoying. Just because people have magic, doesn't mean they can act like slobs, then wave a wand and make it all go away. It's called having respect for yourself.

"Don't you just love how the English. . . ."

Fleur looked around – Where did Paige go?

And how is breakfast almost over already? Why isn't he here? What if— no, it was just a dream. Had to be a dream.

Fleur continued to push the food around her plate, gazing at the Great Hall. She had to admit, there was a certain charm here. The ceiling was a true work of magic and the massive windows with its stained glass scenes were breathtaking. She allowed her eyes to

continue downwards to the students that milled around. It was nice to see more than just blue fabric. Hogwarts robes provided a nice variance with the house colors sewn into the robe, even if it did clash with beautiful green eyes and—

Zut! It's him! And the Great Hall came alive around her – sounds poured in: a few feet away someone was sawing through a slice of breakfast ham, witches were screeching and giggling at the next table and a barrage of voices assaulted her ears, but none of them could drown the sound of her heart thumping in a quickening rhythm.

Fleur tried to ignore it as she watched the young man before her. His hair pointed in more directions than a compass, his frame had yet to fill out, his grin, when it did show up, had a strange innocence – how could he be a hero?

His eyes, the set of his shoulders, the tenseness of his jaw; he was worrying about someone.

He had worried about Gabrielle, too.

How could he not be hero? And now he was looking at her.

She smiled at him and was pleased that he smiled back.

Fleur walked out of the Great Hall and into the refreshing spring morning, welcoming the cool breeze and chattering birds.

The next time Gabrielle wrote to Fleur and asked about him, maybe she'd share the letter with him.

That's exactly what I will do.

Gabrielle sent a letter at least three times a week, and she always asked about Harry Potter.

. . .

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### PROMISES: FULFILLED AND BROKEN

"I'm sorry, Fleur," Harry said, sitting on the edge of the couch in the smaller sitting room. "I've just had a few things running through my head lately."

"Humpf."

He swallowed the lump in his throat. What if she didn't like him?

"I mean, I like you a lot." Why is my voice shaking? "I just have too many things hanging over my head to think straight, I guess."

Fleur looked almost heavenly as the glow of the lights from the city made its way up the valley and through the windows of the room.

"Then I zhink, you should do what you need to do and not worry about anything else."

His heart sank. Did she just reject him?

"I guess so," he answered quietly.

Fleur nodded and marched out of the room. Later that night, Gabrielle found him asleep on the couch, his arms wrapped around his chest, a vice trying to keep the pieces from falling apart.

X O X O X O X

Four days later, Harry stepped away from the rock fence and looked back to the house. The four-foot wall, running almost to the patio, was fully restored on this side of the property now – or at least it would be restored when he finished this last section in a few minutes. If he pushed a little harder, the entire wall could be done by his birthday at the end of the following week, but why? Doing that would just leave him the whole month of August with very little to do but bang his head against a wall.

Harry shook his head at the thought and moved the wheelbarrow that held the concrete down a couple feet and then heaved another rock onto the fence, placing it just to the right of the last one, and twisting it back and forth a couple times so it would settle into the mortar properly. He slathered another trowel full of concrete on the rocks and lifted another one to his chest. He took a step and extended his arms to place it next to the last one.



"Almost finished 'Arry?"

Harry jumped and drew his wand, dropping the stone against the wall. He noticed three of them fell to the ground.

"It's just me!" Gabrielle cried, her hands in the air.

"Sorry, Gabby."

"Let me 'elp." She pointed her wand, whispered, "Wingardium Leviosa," and floated the rocks back up onto the wall. "Do you need to do anything before I set them down?"

Harry quickly scraped off the lower layer of rock and reapplied the cement before Gabrielle let the rocks drop. With a couple quick twists of her wand, they wiggled into place.

"Thanks."

"No problem. I was just coming down to tell you that Fleur should be home in a little while if you want to get cleaned up."

The trowel hit the bottom of the wheelbarrow rather hard.

"I think I'm going to get started on the other section of the fence today." Harry traded the trowel for a tamping tool.

"No, you're not!"

"And why is that?" he asked, pounding the cement into place.

"Because today, you're going to talk to 'er instead of faking that everything is okay."

A sharp 'snap' echoed across the small valley as the tamping tool snapped on impact.

"There's nothing wrong."

Gabrielle picked up a broken piece of metal and twirled it in the air. "Tell zhat to zhe poor tool you just broke into three pieces."

"Ruddy bad workmanship if you ask me," he mumbled, making a show of inspecting his work.

"Oh, I don't know. You've done a great job on the fence; it's your workmanship on Fleur that needs help."

He turned to face the younger girl. "And you're the authority that's going to help me?"

"Nope. I'm just the messenger telling you that you're going to end up having to talk to her today."

"I thought you said 'I'm going to,' not 'I going to end up having to;' there's a difference."

Gabrielle raised her eyebrows slightly and made a little 'o' with her lips. "Did I zay all zhat? I'm zo zorry 'Arry." It all came out in a childlike voice, as well. "I meant zhat we're going to Paris today. Zhat's all!"

She pulled her face into a pout. "Doesn't my newly adopted Big Brother remember promising your little sis that you'd go with us?"

"Unfortunately—"

The cheekiest smile Harry had seen in months spread across her face. "Great! And while we're on the subject, how are you and Fleur doing? I could invite my best friend to come along so the two of you could have some time to yourselves. . . ."

X O X O X O X

Harry let the steam and hot water work together to loosen the knots in his back that had developed since he was reminded of his promise.

"Yeah, this is just what I need, a full afternoon with Fleur, as if the last week and a half wasn't bad enough."

It was easy to see where it started to go wrong. He hurt her when he cut her off as she was trying to protect him from seeing the memories at the ministry. She refused to hold his hand the rest of that day, even though she kept looking at him with those doe-like

eyes. How could any set of eyes carry so much emotion? So much beauty? So much frustration that it makes a wizard stay up half the freaking night trying to figure out what every bloody little look meant and how the hell can any person do that – OUCH!"

Harry looked down and noticed the two broken toes on his right foot.

Next time I should kick something softer.

At least he had found a few healing charms in Gebringang-pínere. He was surprised to learn that a number of the healing charms originated as ways to cover for torture – or make someone healthy enough to begin another round. Salazar Slytherin kept this book in his personal library for what reason?

X O X O X O X

Gabrielle knocked softly on the door. "Fleur, it's me, can I come in?"

"Sure."

She pushed the door open to find Fleur sitting in front of the mirror, watching the younger Veela as she walked into room.

"Hi, how was—" Fleur stopped. "Are you okay?"

"I guess." she answered. "I was just thinking about how much I missed you last year and now that you're working . . . I guess I just figured you'd be too tired today. . . ."

Fleur put her hairbrush down. "Too tired for what?"

She sucked in a breath of air. "You forgot?"

"Forgot? Forgot what, that we're going to Paris today?"

She nodded and Fleur smiled at her. "Of course I didn't forget. Why do you think I changed into Muggle clothes?"

"You promise?" Gabrielle asked, her eyes lighting up.

"I said we'd go, didn't I? You're my favorite sister, of course we're going."

"You're my only sister – and thanks!" She gave Fleur a big hug and made her way to the door, as she spoke again. "I'll just go make sure 'Arry is ready."

The door slammed shut, seemingly of its own accord. She turned back to her sister, noticing in particular the wand quivering in Fleur's hand.

"What do you mean by, 'Arry?" Fleur asked in a very dangerous voice.

She looked at Fleur with the same doe-in-the-headlights look that her sister had perfected. "I, um, the second time I saw him, after . . . you know, I asked him to come with us to Paris. I felt so bad about what happened that I thought I could make it up to him showing him my favorite shops and letting him relax and maybe find an English restaurant – or an even an American quickie-munch place. I'm sorry Fleur. I didn't mean to ruin it for you. Please say you'll still go with me!"

Fleur sighed. "I told you I'd go, didn't I?"

Gabrielle squealed and hugged her again.

"Was that all that was bothering you? You know I wouldn't skip out on you."

It was a split-second decision, but if the opening was there. . .

"I know, I just. . . ."

"Okay, out with it," Fleur demanded.

"Remember when you said something to me about being beautiful rather than just a Veela?" she asked

"That's not how I said it, but I remember. Why?"

Gabrielle walked over and sat down on the iron-framed daybed under the window. "Because I kind of understand what you meant by that, but I'm really confused by relationships with boys. So does

that mean I'm not a mature Veela yet, or does that mean I'm not as smart as you, or does that mean that I'm not even really a Veela?"

Fleur crossed the room and sat next to her. "What would make you think something like that?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's just that I don't understand this Veela thing enough, but I look at Maman and Papa, and they're perfect for each other. They seem so happy. Then I look at you and 'Arry and I think you're perfect for each other – but you don't seem happy at all lately and sometimes, I almost think a little of the 'Beauxbatons Fleur' is back when the two of you are in the same room."

"Perfect for me? Why would you— skip that. What Maman and Papa have, is decades of real, true love. You can't compare that with anything."

Gabrielle wrung her hands together and hoped the next question sounded innocent. "What about you and 'Arry?"

"ARRY AND ME? I DON'T EVEN LIKE 'IM! If he thinks he can pull away from me, be cold to me every morning, make me work all day to convince him to let me hold his hand – he's in for a big surprise!"

She let the silence linger after the outburst, gauging the right time before—

"Sorry, I didn't mean to make you upset," she said.

Fleur took a deep breath. "It's okay. Why don't you go let Maman know we're leaving in a few minutes?"

She was up and walking to the door before Fleur spoke again.

"You might as well make sure he's ready."

"Who?" Gabrielle asked, and grinned.

Fleur narrowed her eyes.

Gabrielle opened the door and then turned back to Fleur with the same cheeky smile she had given Harry earlier. "If you don't even like him, does that mean that I—"

A Tickling Charm cut through the air and slammed into the back of the door that Gabrielle had just managed to close behind her.

"Oh, biiig siiister – did you mean to cast the charm with that much force, or maybe there's a green-eyed—"

"YOU'RE ABOUT TO FIND OUT!"

Gabrielle sprinted down the hall and through her doorway. By the time she got safely inside her room, she was giggling so hard at her own antics that she could barely stand up.

It was so much fun being the cute and "innocent" little sister.

X O X O X O X

Harry took a deep breath, threw the powder into the fire, and called out "Rue de la Magie" . . . and stumbled right into Fleur's arms on the other side.

"Thanks, still haven't figured out the floo thing yet."

"Hmph." Fleur turned around and walked out of the Floo Transport Center, leaving Harry to wonder why she insisted on dragging her hand across his chest, rather than just stepping away from him.

"Come on, 'Arry!" Gabrielle said.

Harry followed the two witches into Vulgaire Paris. Ten minutes later, they stepped onto Quai Branly Street and Harry looked up to see the Eiffel tower.

"Wow. I have no idea how something like that can be built."

"Patience, maybe?" Gabrielle asked.

He thought he caught Fleur mumbling a warning to her sister. Gabrielle seemed to ignore it and grabbed a hold of their hands, pulling them up the street. "Come on, I want to show zhe both of you something."

They walked a little farther before cutting through the Champ de Mars, allowing Harry to see the tower up close. He couldn't help but stop and gaze up at it again.

"I was zhe same way the first time I saw it," Fleur said quietly, standing a couple of feet away from him.

Harry's stomach flipped. He grunted out an agreement and started walking in the general direction they were headed.

Great, the first time she speaks to me in two days and all I can do is grunt. Since when did I turn into Crabb or Goyle?

Gabrielle caught up to him and pointed to the left. "We're going that way."

"What's up there?" Fleur asked from behind them.

"You'll see."

Gabrielle skipped on a head, across a busy intersection and down Rue Saint-Dominique. After a few blocks, she led them to an American coffee shop that he had heard of before, but had never actually been to yet.

After getting their drinks, they intended to visit a few places, including the Louvre, but those plans were cut short quickly due to Gabrielle's reaction to her coffee. They made their way back to the Champ de Mars.

Fleur laughed at Gabrielle, who was currently spinning in circles while looking upwards at the tip of the tower.

"You're going to make yourself zick, Gabby." Fleur warned, her voiced laced with humor.

"Weeeeeeeee" Gabrielle answered as she spun around again, and fell to the ground with a thud.

"Ow often 'ave you ordered a – what was that?"

"A Triple Espresso Macchiato with chocolate drizzle and sugar – once. I guess I know why Stacy made me get it decaffeinated."

"Once? As in zhis is your first time?" Fleur asked, her voice an octave higher than the last question.

She and Harry both laughed. They looked at each other and Harry opened his mouth to speak.

"Come on Gabrielle," Fleur said quickly. "I zhink it's time to give you your first Veela lesson." Fleur walked over to her sister and helped her up. "Point number one, no caffeine until your old enough to handle it."

Gabrielle giggled and wiped the grass off her clothes. After looking around, Fleur pulled out her wand, cleaned off the stains, and moved closer towards a group of people in the distance. There were a few young men in the group.

Harry followed.

"The first thing you 'ave to remember, is that the male 'uman is not so smart. Instead of telling us 'ow they feel, they either stare dumbfounded at you, or away from you."

Harry noticed some of the teenagers in the group were beginning to stare open-mouthed at the two Veela.

"What I used to do when they would stare like that, is look down my nose at them as if to say, 'You 'aven't got a chance in the world,' but since zhat is only true for certain males, there's no reason to treat everyone the same way."

She looked back over her shoulder at Harry. He knew that look well, remembering how she dealt with the male population at Hogwarts. He snorted in response and looked back up at the top of the tower that pierced the cloudless sky.

". . . Over the last few weeks, I've learned zhat tipping your head to acknowledge them, and then continuing as if nothing 'appened works well when you're at a distance."

"But doesn't that encourage zhem?" Gabrielle asked.



"Not at all. I've spent quite a bit of time around the new 'ires in Papa's office without any problems. You should come to work with me sometime; zhere's some good-looking ones there that we could ogle together," she said, her voice as snotty as any Slytherin princess he'd ever had the displeasure of meeting.

Harry forced himself not to look at her. What was she doing? He already apologized, already told her he cared about her. What else did she want? Why was she trying to rub his nose in it now? She was the one that rejected him!

"Are any of them as cute as 'Arry, though?"

"No," Fleur answered. "And that's the next lesson. Harry may be cute, but real men are 'andsome."

Harry found his own way back to Rue de la Magie.

X O X O X O X

"Zhere you are!" Fleur spat out at him through clenched teeth an hour and a half later. He was sitting at an outdoor cafe with ten or twelve tables strewn about, covered in simple but nice white tablecloths. Flowerboxes created a ring around the tables, sectioning the outdoor seating off from the rest of the street.

"You 'ad zhe both of us worried. Why couldn't you be considerate enough to tell us where you were at least—"

"Considerate? Is that something else associated with 'men'? I guess I wouldn't know since I'm not a real man, no?"

Fleur's wand appeared in her hand with a speed that left him very impressed, but he already had his in hand, and was in the process of casting a Protego shield when Fleur spun around on her heel and stomped off down the street. The way people moved out of her way reminded Harry of a movie he watched one night when the Dursleys were gone, except that Fleur didn't even have to strike the ground for this particular sea to part.

"It's a good thing I didn't say what first came mind."

Gabrielle ruffled his hair and sat down across the table from him. "She was really worried about you."

"Yeah, she sure showed it."

"Zhe two of you are impossible." Gabrielle picked up a menu. "I was going to offer to go to an English restaurant so you could get something more like what you were used to eating."

"Thanks, but I don't think it'd be a good idea to leave now," Harry said. "Not if I wanted to live, anyway."

Gabrielle laughed as the waiter approached.

"Ow can I 'elp. . . ."

Harry's stomach turned for a second time that day. The middle-aged waiter looked dumbfounded as he stared at Gabrielle.

"Excuse me!" He said to no avail.

Then he picked up his wand.

"Ey! What was zhat for?" The waiter asked as he rubbed his side where the light Flipendo jinx hit him.

"She's thirteen years old." Harry did his best to stare down the man.

"I don't know what you're talking about," the waiter replied, then took Gabrielle's order without looking at her.

"Zhank you, sir." Gabrielle said to his retreating back before asking Harry, "Did you order yet?"

"Nah. I was waiting for you two."

"Well, I'm here, so why aren't you eating? Waiting for Fleur?" she asked, raising her eyebrows in a mask of innocence.

"No!" He picked up the menu and looked through it, ordering on a whim when the waiter returned with Gabrielle's drink.

They chatted while waiting for the food. Harry found out that since she had come of age, Gabrielle's American friend was reticent to have her over, though that was more for Gabrielle's protection. Her friend had three older brothers who were all as dumbfounded a couple days ago when she showed up at their house as the waiter had just been.

"What about school? Are you worried about how your friends will act there?" Harry asked as the waiter set the plates on the table.

"I'll be private tutored again."

"I thought you attended Beauxbatons."

"I do."

Harry scrunched his eyebrows together. "Huh?"

"Veelas are all 'ome schooled from the first sign of their transformation to six months following it. They don't want what happened to us the other day to 'appen at school."

Harry blushed and Gabrielle roared with laughter, attracting stares from the other tables – well, attracting more stares.

"I'll get to tease you about that for the rest of our lives, won't I?"

He snorted. "Why does every witch I meet lately see fit to tease me?"

"It's how we flirt – I thought you knew that."

Harry was overcome by a sudden coughing fit.

"Guess you didn't know. It's true though. Even my Maman does it, but it's innocent with her– she's just having fun with someone she thinks is sweet. My father even does it a little with some of Fleur's girlfriends, but only when Maman is in the room. They 'ave fun with it."

Harry tried to picture Aunt Petunia and Piers Polkiss . . . Godric's ghost! I hope Mr. Delacour has more Firewhisky.

"Gabrielle! I'm impressed!" a blonde witch called out from the surrounding barrier. "Just three weeks and you're already out with an older man! He's pretty good-looking as— NO!"

Harry had to stop himself from rolling his eyes as hers traced upwards to his scar.

"Hi Paige, come sit with us." Gabrielle said.

Paige walked around the barrier and pulled up a chair. Harry couldn't help but notice her eyes, hair, beauty, and the slight pull that emanated off her. He turned back to Gabrielle. "Let me guess—"

"Yep. A cousin too."

Harry turned back to the partial Veela. "Very nice to meet you Paige."

"And you. So how did – Oh! Is this about you 'saving' her in the second task?"

Harry blushed again.

"No," Gabrielle said. "Me, Fleur, and Harry were visiting Vulgaire Paris today."

"Oh, so where's Fleur?"

"Over there someplace" – she pointed in the general direction of the large storefront down the street that was advertising Vulgaire and wizarding clothes in the window – "she left in a huff."

"Figures. So this isn't a date then?" she asked Gabrielle.

"Nope. Disappointed?"

Paige turned to Harry and winked. "Not in the least."

His blush deepened, but before he could say anything, Paige schooled her features and a playful teenage girl turned into a very attractive but serious young woman. "I don't know if you remember 'Arry, but I was at 'Ogwarts this year too."

"You were? I don't – wait; you sat next to Cho the first night you arrived."

Her smile faltered. "Did she make it?"

"Yeah. She did. But Cedric didn't."

Tears moistened her eyes. "From what I read, neither did Krum. Thank you for getting my cousin home."

"She deserves as much of the credit as I do, probably more."

Paige gave him a benign smile. "Still, I thank you, 'Arry. I've no doubt you greatly 'elped."

She turned back to Gabrielle. "Tell Fleur I'm sorry I missed her. We just made a quick trip 'ome, so I decided to get some shopping done today. We're 'eading back to the nest tomorrow morning."

Gabrielle caught the look on Harry's face and laughed. "Don't worry, 'Arry, it's not a real nest. She just means the place where Veela families flock together during the summer for vacation."

"Really?" Harry asked.

"Yeah," Paige answered. "Since guys who have Veela sisters are immune to Veela magic, it's much safer for all the teenage Veela running around in skimpy swim suits."

"Wait, their immune?"

"Yeah, fathers too. Cuts down on incest, doesn't it?" Paige asked.

Both girls laughed at Harry this time. "Sorry," Paige said. "Didn't mean to make you sick while you ate." She turned to Gabrielle. "I probably won't see you much before Christmas, but I can't wait to catch up and hear all about your new experiences being a Veela – you look stunning, by the way."

"Thanks!" Gabrielle said and hugged the older girl, who kissed her on both cheeks.

Paige turned to Harry and motioned for him to stand up. As soon as he did, she put her arms around him and pulled him into a hug. "I meant what I said. I love Fleur like a sister." She leaned in and gave him a chaste kiss on the corner of his mouth – and quickly back away from him, spitting on the ground. She reached for Gabrielle's drink and downed half of it.

"Que veela peu pute!" she said, and a large, feral, and downright frightening grin creased her face.

"Ow strong is 'is resistance?" Paige asked Gabrielle.

"E surprised me one night and I hit him with all my veela magic – after my physical changes were complete. 'E didn't even get out of the couch."

The grin grew larger. "Prepare yourself," she said to Harry.

Harry gripped the table and fought off the urge to rip every shred of clothing from Paige and take her right there on the table.

"Okay?" Paige asked, a few seconds later.

"What the bloody hell was that!"

"Just a special 'ello to Fleur. That's all." She hugged Harry again, this time pressing her body against his, though she stood off-center so it wasn't as intimate as it would seem.

Finished, Paige winked at Gabrielle and walked off.

Harry was still standing, unaware of his surrounds and trying figure out what had just happened when he felt a pair of hands on his cheeks. He looked down slightly to see Gabrielle standing inches away from him—

—and pulled his head down, kissing him smack on the lips, only to pull back, sputtering and spitting. She took a large sip of her drink and swished it around in her mouth before spitting it out in the large flowerpot, then downed the rest of her drink.

"Would someone please tell why the hell veelas keep kissing me and then acting as if they had just kiss the arse-end of a mountain troll?"

Guffaws erupted around the little outside diner and Harry quickly realized he was the center of attention. He sat down and glared at his dinner partner.

"I had no idea," she said to herself. "This changes everything."

"What. Changes. What!" He demanded.

"So, 'Arry. Did you enjoy kissing my sister?"

Harry sat, wide-eyed and slack-jawed, absent of thought.

X O X O X O X

"Ow dare 'e say that to me!"

Fleur threw down the umpteenth blouse she had tried on and dressed again in her own light pink, short-sleeved shirt. She unlocked the door, gathered up the mountain of clothes, and dropped them off on the "return" cart at the entrance to the dressing room.

With a quick rasp, they were back on their hangers and in their original places.

"Of all the things to throw back in my face. . . ."

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Mademoiselle?"

"Zhere is nothing you can do for me!" She stormed to the front door of the clothing store, but stopped herself and turned back to the young man behind the counter. "Sorry. That shouldn't have been directed at you."

"It's okay. Have a good evening."

Fleur stepped out and walked back down the street towards the restaurant where she left Harry and Gabrielle, when she noticed that

he was blushing furiously and most of the people sitting around them were laughing.

What has mon amour—that English dog done this time?

She stopped at the flower barrier. "Ready to head 'ome?"

Harry looked up at her, his emotions playing out on his face. Fleur could almost label every one as they passed: apprehension, anger, sadness, confusion. . . .

Good, now he knows how I feel.

"Aren't you going to eat?" Gabrielle asked.

A new . . . something played on Harry's face: was that hope?

"I guess I should eat," she said before catching herself. Fleur walked to the table, pulled out a chair and sat down.

"So, what did the two of you 'ave—"

The air was full of pheromones.

Why were they so strong?

She narrowed her eyes and looked over to her little sister, then back at Harry. Their body language says it has nothing to do with Gabrielle, but the scent is already too old to be caused by me. So what. . . .

A second scent wafted by Fleur and she stiffened, knuckles white as she balled her hands into fists to keep control of herself.

Gabrielle smirked. "'Arry and I were just talking. Well, really, I was asking questions and 'e sat in 'is seat petrified. Maybe you could answer?"

"I'm not in the mood to play twenty questions." she said in her mother-tongue.

"Good, then I'll only ask one," Gabrielle replied in French as well. "How did you enjoy kissing 'Arry?"



Gabrielle let lose a brilliant smile and Fleur almost made herself a single child after thirteen years.

"We never kissed," she whispered, trying desperately to keep her temper under control.

"My cute ass, you didn't kiss him," Gabrielle said. "Not only did you kiss him, but you marked him."

"Marked him? How do you—I swear if he tried to kiss you to get back at me, I'm going to—"

"Oh, don't go sprouting feathers you hen."

Fleur froze in surprise, having never been dismissed by her sister before. But Gabrielle didn't stop there. "If you really think he'd use me to get back at you, then you don't deserve him in the first place."

"So, tell me then. What did you do? No, wait, let me guess—the first chance you get, you stick your tongue down his throat, no?"

"Hello," the waiter interrupted, unaware of any tension since he was looking at his pad of paper, not wanting to cause any more trouble. "Can I get you anything to eat?" he asked Fleur.

Gabrielle piped up. "Anything large enough to shove in her mouth and keep her quiet should be fine."

"I'll come back in a couple minutes if you would like," he suggested.

"That won't be necessary."

She opened the menu and threw it down on the table, then chose the first thing she saw, not even reading what it was. The waiter quickly wrote it down and retreated from the line of fire.

"Fleur, we're being rude to 'Arry, speaking in French in front of him."

"I don't give a damn. I want to know why you decided to kiss my—kissed this English excuse for a man."

"If you really want to know, I was confirming a suspicion. I think someone else left a message for you, however."

Fleur raised an eyebrow at her sister, then turned to Harry, leaned in, and sniffed. Crinkling her nose, she leaned in a little further and sniffed again.

"Who. Was. The. Veela. Whore?"

Gabrielle leaned back and picked up her newly filled glass, taking a sip before answering. "Funny, she called you the same thing."

Fleur flushed with anger. "You are going to tell me now, or I'm going to hex that so-called cute ass of yours all the way home."

"Who else do you think would put their magical scent all over someone just to play with you?"

"Paige?"

"Yep. She thanked him for getting you back to France safely and gave him a peck on the side of the lips . . . why are you turning white?"

Fleur ignored her.

Gabrielle giggled, and continued. "So then, she decided to mess with you and hit him with her veela magic before rubbing her scent all over him. Of course, I had to find out why she spit in the bushes after kissing him and then downed half my drink. So I kissed him."

Fleur's eyes narrowed again.

"And spit half of what was left of my drink in the bushes before downing the rest of it. So, Fleur, do tell. How did you enjoy your kiss with 'Arry?"

"If it's not too much problem," Harry cut in, "I'd like to know why my name keeps coming up."

"Oh, no reason," Gabrielle answered. "It's just veela sister-stuff."

The waiter returned and put the bowl on the table. Harry's eyes widened before he closed them and turned away, looking down the street for the rest of the meal.

Fleur glared at him for a minute, but he wasn't about to turn around, so she gave up and looked down at her plate.

There, sitting before her, was a single serving of Bouillabaisse.

X O X O X O X

Things only got worse over the next five days. Fleur tried to apologize for the way she acted when she came back from the store, but Harry just shrugged it off and said it wasn't a big deal. It was the wrong thing to say as Fleur became even more upset with Harry's emotional retreat, which, in turn, made Harry retreat even further.

He spent most of his days after that working on the wall during the afternoons and evening so he didn't have to deal with Fleur. One thing he noticed was that the rocks seemed to have become much lighter over the last month.

Sirius, Charlie, and Remus came to France the following Sunday for Harry's birthday. Tonks wanted to come, but was caught up in some Order business that necessitated her special talents.

"Tonks really was sorry; seems you made quite the impression on her," Sirius said, and made himself comfortable on the couch in the small sitting room of Harry's downstairs' apartment.

"Yeah well," Charlie began, "saving someone's life will do that. She wanted me to tell you 'thank you'. Had you and Fleur not flown into the trees that night and taken the Death Eaters by surprise, she would have been dead."

"Shame I wasn't fast enough for Mrs. Weasley though," Harry said quietly.

Charlie rested an arm on Harry's shoulder. "Tonks caught you out of the corner of her eye as you flew into the woods. We watched her memory in the Pensieve. You couldn't have gone any faster. How the hell did you avoid the trees?"

Harry walked over to the corner of his room and picked up his broom. "I didn't."

A low whistle escaped Remus's lips. "Do you know the sheer force it takes to do this kind of damage to the stirrups of a Firebolt?"

Charlie chuckled. "You're going to Pensieve that flight for me Harry."

"As long as I don't have to see it again, you can have it."

The three adults looked at each other and the older two walked out of the room.

"Harry, I wanted to talk to you for a minute alone."

He sat down in the large black club chair and waived for Charlie to take Sirius's spot on the low-slung couch.

"You barely knew me and Bill, but you made quite an impression on us last summer, probably the same one you made on the rest of my family. I've been talking with Sirius and Remus about what will happen to you after the war and . . ."

Harry watched him closely, not sure he liked where this was going.

". . . I don't know if you'd be comfortable with it, but I'll probably head back to Romania after everything is finished and I've offered to let the two of them live in the Burrow. You're welcome to it as well."

Harry nodded. He didn't want to think about staying there with all the memories, but at least he wouldn't have to worry about it. He'd be dead a few moments after the war was over anyway.

"I also wanted your permission to ward the Burrow to accept you as the owner in case I'm killed. I know it's not much, but—"

"Give it to Sirius."

"He already has a place."

"Then Remus. He doesn't have a place of his own."

"Well that's a bit bugged, you see. Since he suffers from Lycanthropy, the laws won't allow him an inheritance."

"But if we win, then the laws can change."

"Sorry, Harry, but those laws were put into place a century ago."

Harry chuckled darkly. A century ago? What, exactly, was the difference between Death Eaters and the rest of the wizards?

"What happens if I don't make it?"

"Then we give it to one of my relatives, but they don't really care about the Burrow, not like you do. It would mean a lot to me and I know it's something my mum and dad would've wanted."

"I guess it's okay then, but I really don't think I'd want to live there. Too many memories."

The slow nod and sigh reminded him that Charlie had a lot more emotions invested there than he ever did or would. It was time to change the subject. "So how are you and Tonks doing?"

Charlie grinned. "It's about the only good thing to come out of this war. Of course, the war is just too big for us to take on a serious relationship right now."

"But after?" Harry asked.

"Yeah," Charlie answered, "if we both make it, maybe I won't be going to Romania right away after all. It doesn't matter though as far as your concerned, Sirius and Remus would still be at the Burrow. I'd want to start something new with her somewhere else."

Harry's lip pulled up. "Not serious? Sounds like you've been doing a little planning."

Charlie cocked an eyebrow back at him. "Getting cheeky are we? Just remember, I can outrun you, and I am faster than you on a broom, though not by much from what I saw."

"I don't know about that," Harry said. "But I hope it happens."

"What, Tonks and me together after the war, or me chasing you on a broom?"

"Both."

Charlie grinned widely. "Any time you want to race, just let me know."

They made their way upstairs a few minutes later to rejoin Sirius and Remus, who were being both charmed and entertained by Gabrielle's recounting of Harry's introduction to Paige.

"Hi, big brother!" she called out when Harry entered the smaller sitting room next to the kitchen.

Harry stopped mid-step.

"You know," Sirius began, "I don't think I've heard so much mischievous delight in just three words since. . . ."

"The three of us?" Remus asked.

"No, she even outmatches Lily. She's almost to the level of—"

"Oh bloody hell, no! That lovely witch was the only Prefect that could make you and James toe the line the last couple of years."

"Yeah, another hell of a witch cut down too soon."

A moment of silence passed before Sirius lightened the mood. "So, Harry, I hear you're a Veela magnet."

"It's good to see he can still blush," Remus said.

"He does it often; you should have seen him blush the first two times he saw me here," Gabrielle said.

"Just what have you been doing while you've been in France?" Charlie asked him.

Mrs. Delacour happened to walk into the room just then and answered for Harry. "Watching my thirteen year old daughter run naked down the hall."

Gabrielle, to Harry's relief, turned red as well.

The Delacour matriarch told them the story while they waited for dinner. Fleur and her father arrived home from the Ministry and joined them. After the meal, they spent the evening catching up.

"How's Neville doing?" Harry asked three hours later.

"Not so well." Remus said.

Harry could tell they had wanted to avoid the subject.

"Tell me," he demanded.

"He and Su Li were visiting his parents in St. Mungo's when a wave of patients came in from another Death Eater attack, but this time the Death Eaters weren't happy with just sending them to the hospital, so they came looking for them. A battle ensued." Sirius explained.

Harry was surprised when he felt a hand slip into his. He looked over to notice Fleur had moved next to him.

"Bellatrix was with them and found Neville, Su Li, and his parents."

Harry felt his heart race. Blood drained from his face, leaving him pasty white. He forgot about everything else. If Neville were dead, Harry would demand they take him with them back to England tonight. His revenge would begin immediately.

"She killed both of Neville's parents. Neville managed to trick Bellatrix and get him and Su Li out of the ward. But as they ran down the hall, she hit Su Li in the back with the killing curse."

Harry stepped away from Fleur. "Why the hell would she do that? What is wrong with that bitch? She needs to be Cruciatused into madness and then killed - slowly!"

"Harry!" Mrs. Delacour said; her hand over her mouth.

He turned to her. "She and three others used the same curse to put Neville's parents in the ruddy hospital in the first place. For twelve

hours they suffered the Cruciatus curse while that effing bint squealed with bloody delight."

Harry took a breath. "Bellatrix will die for what she did."

It took five minutes to calm the resulting commotion.

"Harry, I want to know what you're planning," Mr. Delacour said. He raised his hand before Harry could respond. "I need to know if I need to take a leave of absence to join you."

The room erupted in a cacophony of sound.

"SILENCE!"

Mr. Delacour raising his voice seemed to be a very rare occurrence. A veela feather hitting the floor would have echoed through the house.

"If they are willing to murder people lying in hospital beds – what's going to happen when they cross le Manche? If I must kill again, I damn well prefer to do it on foreign soil, then at my own back door like last time."

"Mon Amour, 'Arry turns fifteen years old tomorrow. He's too young to run off to war."

"With all due respect, ma'am," Sirius interrupted. "Harry's been in this war since he was a year old. He's been in more battles and faced Voldemort more times than our most experienced fighters. I don't want him in England either, but I am not foolish enough to think he's too young."

"There's no need to worry," Harry said into the silence that followed Sirius's declaration. "I'm not going back yet, nor will I kill Bellatrix. She's Neville's bitch to spay."

X O X O X O X

Fleur lay in bed that night staring up at the ceiling.



Enough is enough. Harry is going to lose himself if he doesn't have an anchor. I have to be that anchor. After his party tomorrow, I'll go down to his room and we'll straighten everything out.

X O X O X O X

The next day, Harry woke up to the three adult men standing over him.

"I say we use a Levitation charm and dump him, in his knickers, on the dining room table."

"Not bad, Remus. Of course, there's nothing wrong with an Aguamenti spell right in bed. I even warned him about it back at the Burrow."

Harry didn't even bother raising his head from the pillow. "Do it and you'll find yourself lying next to Bellatrix by the time it's all over."

"Little blighter really is getting cheeky," Charlie said as he grabbed a hold of the sheets at the bottom of the bed and yanked.

Remus levitated him three feet off the bed and Sirius hit him with a spout of water.

"Wake up Harry! It's your birthday!" they all yelled.

Remus stopped the spell and Harry fell back to the bed. But as he hit the mattress, he reached under his pillow and grabbed his wand. The mattress sprung him back up in the air and Harry spun around, hitting Sirius with a Jelly-legs jinx. As he continued to spin, Charlie, at the end of the bed, was hit with a stunner.

Harry's wand flew out of his hand and he was drenched by an Aguamenti spell by Remus.

"Alright, alright, I give!" Harry said, trying to get away from the stream of water.

"You get an 'O' for speed, accuracy, and quick thinking. But strategy has to be a 'D' at most.

Below the mattress, Harry heard his godfather guffawing. "Yeah, but he did get two of the three of us after we had him suspended in mid-air."

Remus pointed his wand at the floor beyond the end of the bed and cast a Rennervate spell at Charlie.

"Thanks." Charlie stood back up and chuckled. "I didn't even see it coming."

"Well, now that I'm up I might as well get a shower."

Harry got out of bed and headed to the bathroom.

"Wait a second. What happened to you?" Sirius asked. "A month ago you were still a skinny kid. Now look at you."

Harry turned around and looked in the mirror, and figured out why the rocks felt much lighter now. He wasn't bulky, but he was very well defined, to say the least.

Harry shrugged. "I refused to live here for free, so Mr. Delacour had me rebuild the rock fence out back and I decided to do it without magic."

"I can tell."

"You know," Charlie said. "I'd do the same if I was his age, especially with all the pretty young women around here."

Harry rolled his eyes, grabbed a pair of clean knickers from the drawer, and disappeared into the bathroom for a shower. Twenty minutes later, he came out to find his trunk sitting on his bed.

"I thought you might be missing it," Sirius said, leaning against the door frame.

"Thanks." Harry opened the trunk and dug into it, pulling out one of Dudley's old shirts that had been passed down to him the summer before he began attending Hogwarts. He quickly dried off and pulled the shirt over his head, only to look down in consternation as something was constricting around his chest.

"What the. . ."

Sirius chuckled. "Looks like you grew a little more than you thought. I think you should try another shirt."

Harry had to settle on one of his new shirts. He cast a dirty look at the pile of shirts sitting next to his trunk. "How could I have grown out of half my shirts in a month?"

"Where they already small on you?"

"No, they were just beginning to fit me."

Sirius nodded. "Just finished your Fourth Year, right?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Your father came back to school for his Fifth Year three inches taller and probably ten or so pounds heavier. Even the clothes he bought at the beginning of the summer didn't fit. Add to that, the work you've been doing with those rocks and the fact you're probably being fed well here" – he gestured to the pile of clothes – "and you get this."

Sirius sat down on the edge of the bed. "So what's going on with you and Fleur?"

"Nothing much," Harry answered. He began filling his trunk with the new clothes he had bought over the last month.

"That's not what I hear."

"Then why ask?"

Sirius grabbed a shirt from Harry and slapped his hand away. "You've been relying on too many house-elves to fold your clothes. Watch me."

He folded the shirt slowly. "I ask, because I want to know what's happening in your head."

"You mean except for the Horcrux that makes anything I do, except prepare to kill as many Death Eaters as possible before I die, not worth it?"

"Yep, that's exactly what I mean," Sirius answered, straightening the wrinkles before he folded the shirt again.

"In that case, nothing. I finally gave in and decided that despite everything, I wanted to be with Fleur, only to find out that she basically hates me and still thinks of me a little boy."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Sirius said, laying the neatly folded shirt in the trunk. "Don't give up so soon though. Remember, your mother hated your father for years before they started dating. Something tells me it'll be a lot easier with Fleur."

"Doubt it. Personally, I think killing Voldemort is going to be easier than trying to date Fleur."

Sirius let out another chuckle. "And her little sister? She's a right handful, that one. Any thoughts about her?"

"No. I can only see her as a little sister as well, but I'm starting to feel guilty about that, too."

Finished folding the clothes, Sirius floated Harry's trunk off his bed over to the side of the room.

"Why? Do you think she likes you?"

"No, it's more, well. It's like I feel guilty for cheating on Hermione. She was a sister to me and now I'm replacing her."

Sirius sat back down on the bed. "Do you treat her the same way you did Hermione?"

"I wasn't nearly as protective of Hermione. I always figured she knew more curses than me and it was usually Ron that took the 'protective' roll."

"Do you still think about Hermione?"

"All the time, and Ron, and Fred and George, and Ginny, and all the rest of them."

"I could ask you questions all day Harry, but you haven't replaced Hermione. Jacque told me how they have decided to take you in to their home, and it was a damn nice thing for them to do. After saving Gabrielle in the second task – even though she wasn't in danger – and being taken-in by her parents, it's normal to look at her as a little sister."

"So I should look at Fleur like a big sister?" Harry asked, his voice sarcastic.

"That's up to you – whatever you enjoy, you know? Though not even James was that kinky."

"I didn't need to hear that." Harry said, his face screwed up in a look of disgust.

Sirius chuckled again as he stood up and walked to the door. "It's almost time to go upstairs. Unless you want Fleur to give you a birthday shag, I'd suggest you put on something more than your boxers before you come upstairs."

Harry threw one of his old shirts at him, but he turned serious a moment later. "Thanks, Sirius. I've needed someone to talk to."

"It's what I'm here for. Oh, I have something else for you."

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a ring on a chain. "I think you left it at the Burrow."

Harry didn't notice when Sirius stepped out of the room. He was still too focused on the ring in his hand. He tried to slide it on his finger, but it was still too loose, so he slipped it around his neck on the chain.

X O X O X O X

Harry spent the morning working on the fence again, while Sirius, Remus, and Charlie tried to make him drop the stones on his feet by laughing too hard. Gabrielle spent most of the morning with them too, and was beat red from the humor.

Fleur came home from the ministry around lunchtime, and spent the early part of the afternoon with Remus and Charlie, catching up on Order business and making plans for contacting them when she and Harry went back to England.

Harry and Sirius spent the afternoon at the very end of the valley.

"Are you sure no one can see the spells, Sirius?"

"Absolutely. You're forgetting the family I come from. This ward blocks everything but the underage trace. No one will see it unless they come down here and enter the ward. Now, show me what you've been learning."

"Duel? Are you. . . never mind."

"You weren't going to just ask me if I was serious, were you?"

"Oh belt up."

Sirius stripped off his shirt and limbered up a bit. "Normally, you won't have time to get ready, but there's no way I'm dueling under this sun with a robe and dark shirt on."

"Are you sure it's safe? I mean, what if I let loose something that I shouldn't?"

"Don't worry." He gestured around him. "These are dueling wards. It's one of the reasons no one else can see the spells. The wards also control the power of the spells you throw. A stunner will still stun, a cutting curse will still cut, but the wards greatly limit their effects so that no spell cast in here is dangerous. Now let's duel."

Harry nodded, and remembered what he'd read in the Muggle autobiography. Without another word, he shot a flash of light from his wand, blinding his godfather for an instant and Apparated behind him. Sirius shook his head and opened his eyes again, pointing his wand to where Harry should have been. Harry put his wand in Sirius's back and whispered the spell for a Jelly-Legs jinx.

"When the hell did you learn how to Apparate?" Sirius asked, lying flat on his back.

"Turns out, Mr. Delacour started his career at the French Ministry teaching Apparation."

Harry heard Sirius swearing under his breath, then he heard the familiar squelching noise that told him anti-Apparition wards had just been cast.

He offered Sirius a hand up. "Sorry, I couldn't resist."

"Sorry my left nut, Harry. Never be sorry for catching your enemy off guard. It's the best way to make sure you stay alive. Now step back and duel."

Harry got back to his side and turned around – and ducked. A red curse grazed his head. A second, green looking curse was already headed towards his midsection. Harry put up a Protego Shield, but the Killing Curse cut right through it and took Harry in the midsection. He doubled over and fell to the ground, gasping for breath.

"Bloody hell! What was that?"

"The Killing Curse. You should recognize it by now. You've cast it enough."

"What? You just . . . how am I alive?"

"The wards, Harry. Remember what I said? We're in a specially made dueling ward. It moderates every spell so that they won't permanently injure someone. You need to get used to seeing that spell and using your surrounds to block it. It's being cast with abandon across the Channel now."

Harry got up to his knees. "I always thought it took a lot out of you to cast that spell."

"It does, but magical strength and stamina is based on the same concept as physical strength and stamina." He pointed at the rock fence. "I imagine those rocks were pretty heavy at the beginning of summer."

Harry nodded.

"And now?"

"Not so much."

"You saw the reason in the mirror. Our magic reacts the same way. The more you use it and work it out, the stronger it gets. That's why wizards get better and better with age if they keep at it. Magic isn't hindered by getting old."

Harry pushed himself back up to his feet and took a few more breaths as Sirius looked farther out over the city below them, and the ocean beyond that. "I could really get used to living in a place like this. Maybe after the war, I'll buy something around here."

"Only if you live through this duel," Harry challenged.

"Raise your wand, boy!"

Curses of every color streaked out from both wands. They battled over the next half-hour, with Harry more often than not finding himself lying on the ground.

Sirius however, seemed to be having fun. He twisted his wand and let loose a series of curses that arced towards Harry, who ended up jumping out of the way. He faced his godfather again, and barely sidestepped a murky, gray colored curse.

I've about had enough of this crap!

He reached deep into his new-found knowledge and pulled out an old charm/curse combination that was a little dark and had fallen out of fashion.

He cast a charm on his left hand, then cast a curse on it. Another curse from Sirius came straight at him. Harry stepped around it and cast a three point cutting curse, essentially throwing three distinct curses, trailing each other at a downward angle, towards Sirius, who danced out of the way to the Harry's left, just like he wanted.

Harry flexed his left hand, activating the charm, which threw off the curse that he had put on it.



A bright yellow light shot from his hand, directly into the Sirius's stomach as he was still focused on the passing blue curses.

Sirius went down in a heap and vomited his lunch all over the ground.

"I've been around a long time Harry," Sirius said few minutes later as he washed his mouth out with water, "and I've never seen that combination, or a yellow curse like that. What was it?"

"If we weren't in wards, you would have just puked out your guts, literally."

Sirius whipped his wand around in the air and the squelching noise ripped up the lower part of the valley, taking the wards down.

"Had enough?" He asked.

"I've seen more than enough." Sirius said, staring Harry down.

"You're peeved at me?"

"What the hell do you think? My best friend's son, my godson is casting dark curses. You're damn right I'm miffed."

He sat down on the nearest bench before his knees gave out. He'd never seen his godfather like this, not towards him. "But – but you didn't have a problem with me when I used the Cruciatus curse on Voldemort."

"No, I didn't, because you didn't PRACTICE IT before hand. It was a reflex."

"Yeah? What about the Killing Curse you threw at me at the start of practice?" Harry practically yelled.

"The Killing Curse was added to the list of Dark Arts because it is damn near impossible to stop unless you are good at levitating objects into its path. It doesn't cause pain. Can you say the same about the curse you cast? What kind of pain would that cause?"

"For a Death Eater? Not enough."

Harry had never seen Sirius's eyes burn the way they did now. It made him uncomfortable that they never left him either.

Finally, he spoke. "You want to dance with the Dark Arts, Harry? Just remember, ye who dances, also gets kissed. Get back to your position."

Another squelching noise rolled back down the valley and the dueling wards went back up.

"You are not going to enjoy this," Sirius warned.

Sirius flicked his wand once and a wave of noise rushed over Harry. He found himself lying on the ground, the world spinning around him.

"Had that been the real world, both your eardrums and inner ear would have been destroyed. You would be left with complete vertigo the rest of your life, and deaf on top of it. Now get up!"

"You effing hypocrite!" Harry yelled. "How long have you practiced the Dark Arts?"

Harry got back up to his feet and raised his wand, sending a liquefying curse at Sirius, straight out of Gebringang-Pínere.

It was the wrong choice. Sirius recognized the curse and for the first time in Harry's life, he saw Sirius truly angry at him, then he saw a rainbow of colors.

~ . ~ . ~

"Where am I?" Harry asked.

Remus moistened a towel and laid it on his head.

"You're on your bed. Do you know where your bed is?"

"Yeah, in the Delacour basement. Where's Sirius?"

"He's right here," Remus said.

"How are you feeling, Harry?" Sirius asked.

"Like I got railroaded by the Hogwarts Express. I swear that spell felt like my entire body was being ripped apart at the joints, about the same time a weight was crushing my chest. What was that?"

"A Dark spell on par with the one you tossed at me. The only difference is, I can make them work much better than you can."

Harry glared at his godfather. "Since when have you been a Dark Wizard?"

"I was born one, remember? But you're being a little hypocritical, I think. After all, my father taught my brother and me most of those curses growing up. Just because I choose not to use them, doesn't mean I don't remember them. The difference between you and me, however, is that you've chosen to learn dark spells so that you can use them."

"It's different," Harry protested.

"Different? This is going to be rich. How are your Dark Spells different from anyone else's? And before you answer, remember Grindlewald thought the same thing half a century ago."

"It's different because of what I have in my head, what it's going to take for me to get rid of it, and who I plan on taking with me when I do."

Remus put his hand on Harry's shoulder as he sat on his bed. "We told you not to think that way. We'll find a different way out of this."

"But I have to face Voldemort. So either I become strong enough to kill him, and then take my own life, or I get killed by him, and someone else finishes off Voldemort. Either way, I die, so why not learn enough to shove the Dark Arts right back up their collective arse?"

"And what happens if you change your mind?" Sirius asked. "What happens if you become the next Dark Lord? With the power you're throwing around and the pain and hatred you have, you have to know you're flirting with that possibility."

"I've already taken care of it."

"How's that?" Sirius asked again.

"I made an oath with someone. If I become a Dark Lord, he'll kill me. If he becomes one, I'll kill him."

"You think it's that easy?" Charlie asked from the other side of the bed.

"Yeah. It's what friends do."

"Who?" Sirius wanted to know.

"Neville," Remus whispered.

"Harry," Sirius began, "I'm about to tell you something I've never told anyone else. I am also the only one out of the six of us that knew about it."

"That prophecy concerning you—could have been either you or Neville. Voldemort chose to make it about you by going after you instead of him. I just figured it out a week or two ago after piecing everything together."

"And?" Harry asked, not sure what this had to do with the topic of Dark Arts and Dark Lords.

"And now you and Neville are both being consumed by the very Darkness you're trying to destroy," Sirius answered. "Your parents and Neville's parents made great sacrifices for you two, and now both of you are throwing that away."

"My father didn't die fighting the Dark Arts. He died fighting a half-blooded maniac and Pureblood idiots who followed him."

"Both of your parents died because someone was using very dark magic to push their agenda. There's no way to argue around it Harry. Look, I know we talked about this at the Burrow, and as much as I didn't like the idea of you researching any kind of Dark Arts, I understood what you were saying. But you have to know where the line is; you have to know what is too much."

The Line. "You have to know where the line is." Damn!

"Um, what if I had someone offer to teach me where the line is?" Harry asked.

Sirius backed up and raised his hands, palms out. "No, no, no. I am not teaching my godson about the Dark Arts. I don't know where that line is because I have never used them myself, nor am I planning on it."

"I wasn't talking about you."

Sirius lowered his arms. "Jacque?"

"Nope. Professor Sirko."

"A professor?" Remus interrupted. "I didn't think Beauxbatons would employ anyone that came close to having that type of knowledge."

"They wouldn't," Charlie said, gazing hard at Harry. "We did a little more than just raising dragons in Romania. Professor Sirko is the Dark Arts professor at Durmstrang."

"There is no way in hell you're going there," Sirius said. "You might as well go right to Voldemort and offer him your own wand to kill you. It'd amount to the same thing."

"No, it wouldn't," Harry argued, and spent the next twenty minutes explaining to the others in the room what Professor Sirko had shared over lunch. Half-way through, Charlie went upstairs and brought down Mr. Delacour, who confirmed what Harry had said.

"I still don't like it," Sirius said. "But you may be right. I'll have to find out where it is and spend some more time as Padfoot. I'm not leaving you there alone."

Harry tried to argue with him, but Mr. Delacour raised his hand to silence him. "Sirius, you know as well as I do that it's almost impossible to find on your own and even if you did, it's probably in a place quite inhospitable for a single person to survive in nature. On the other hand, since Harry is living here and by virtue of my position at the French Ministry, I could get up to see him at least once a month, maybe even every two weeks or so. How much did you see him last year?"

"You have a point," Sirius agreed after thinking about it. "Harry?"

"I'm still not sure if I'm going or not. It was just a suggestion."

"But if you do go, are you comfortable with Mr. Delacour looking in on you?"

"Absolutely," Harry answered without hesitation.

X O X O X O X

That evening after dinner and Harry's birthday cake, Sirius, Remus, and Charlie used a Portkey to get back to England. The rest of the family settled in for a nice evening, when the subject of Fleur's afternoon with Charlie and Remus came up.

Fleur gave a few vague answers.

Harry decided to clarify.

Fleur followed Harry downstairs to his apartment, barely getting the door closed and a Privacy Charm cast before she exploded.

"YOU 'AD NO RIGHT!"

"Your father has every right in the world to know that you joined the Order."

"And why do you zhink zhat is for you to decide?"

"Why? You are seriously asking me why? It's the blasted ORDER, Fleur. Out of the forty or so members the first time around; how many were alive when it was over, huh? Five? Ten?"

"So what? My job is to be a relay between zhem and you. It is not to go out and track Death Eaters or battle them."

"Oh, I'm sure that'll stop them from coming for you, right? Just like it stopped them from coming to the Burrow?"

Fleur stood in silence, rubbing her temples. Harry could see that she was physically trembling.

"Why do you care?" he asked.

"Why? Because . . . because. . . ." She paused. "I lo—"

"THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT! You have no idea. You just felt obligated to take care of me, didn't you? Well guess what, you don't have to do that anymore - I'm leaving for Durmstrang as soon as I can!"

"WHAT!"

"Hey, I have an idea. Maybe I'll leave a little of the fence unfinished and you can invite some of the 'men' you enjoy watching so much from the ministry over to finish it."

Fleur's eyes flared and her face elongated for a good five seconds before shifting back into its human form. She looked at him in the exact same way she did the night she found out he was going to be the fourth participant in the Tri-wizard tournament.

"Yes, maybe I should. It seems that I've been spending too much time around a leetle boy, instead of adults."

So much for the daydream; hello nightmare.

Fleur left the room, but Harry called out to her retreating back, "At least you've finally learned I'm a leetle boy, instead of an effing Hero!"

Harry turned his back to her, missing the way his words struck Fleur like a smack to the face. Of course, her words stung him just as much.

X O X O X O X

The next few days were unbearable. Dinners were especially tense affairs. Harry or Fleur would sit down to eat half-way through the meal, and the other would leave a just a few minutes later. Then, Fleur began spending more and more time at the Ministry and going out with friends to escape Harry entirely.

The following Saturday, Harry was in the house alone. Mr. Delacour had to go into work for a few hours and everyone else had gone into the city.

He heard a thumping noise on the window of his bedroom and pulled the curtains back, looking up to see an owl with a letter tied around its leg, standing on the ground.

Harry went upstairs and out the back door, stopping on the way to get some owl treats.

"Here, you go," he said, after taking the letter. "Do I need to reply to this?"

In response, the owl made itself comfortable and sat down to wait. Harry pulled up a chair and read the letter.

~ . ~ . ~

Harry:

I am pleased to find that you want to attend Durmstrang this year, though my suspicion is that you are not worried as much about tests and grades as you are defeating a certain Dark Lord. For that reason, I am inviting you to begin your training next Friday.

We will spend the first three weeks assessing you and trying to jump at least a year in your education, though that is a tall order. We will, however, have you at the level of a Seventh year by the end of October and begin learning advanced magic thereafter, so be prepared to work with very little downtime, as we are basically cramming a year's worth of education into each of the first three months.

I have asked a few people to help with your training. They will work primarily with your basic spells and charms the first couple of months. You will stay in one of the student dorms with the Seventh Years, since you will be at the same magical level soon enough, and for another reason that I will not go into now.

This letter is charmed as a Portkey. It will activate at 1:45 pm, next Friday. I will meet you when you arrive.



I look forward to working with you.

Professor Sirko.

P.S. Please send a reply to let me know that these arrangements work for you. Also, Mr. Delacour is welcomed to visit at anytime, provided he is patient with our schedule. We will not break your training for visitors, especially between now and the beginning of September. There is too little time to do so.

~ . ~ . ~

Harry quickly scribbled off a reply and sent the owl on its way, then leaned back in the chair. He'd miss this view, this house, and the Delacours, but at least he wouldn't constantly have his heart torn apart by the snotty looks and cold shoulder he was getting from Fleur these days.

A/N: First, as the title says, so I need to do. Promises kept; Master Odin has published three chapters of a fic called "The Potters and the Moon Princess." It's a Next Gen fic, but incorporates some of our favorite HP characters from this generation as well, plus a nice set of OC's that are well thought out. He likes long reveals, so give it two chapters and please, leave him reviews! [.net/s/7917051/1/The\\_Potters\\_and\\_the\\_Moon\\_Princess](http://www.fanfiction.net/s/7917051/1/The_Potters_and_the_Moon_Princess)

And if you get a chance, check out his avatar. I laugh every time I see it.

A/N 2: The other week, I finally broke down, and told my wife that I was a fanfic author – yes, I came out of the fanfic closet after almost a year. So I gave her this story to read and she hated me for days for making her cry! Now, she's a proofreader for me. So, thank you to my lovely, beautiful wife for both supporting my habit, and also for proofing the work! You're wonderful.

A/N 3: A MASSIVE thank you to Mr. Wallace – who has volunteered to be my final beta- the guy that reads through and makes sure I haven't made any stupid mistakes fixing things the first three have pointed out. He currently has two stories up for the Fallout world. Check 'em out as well!

NOW – as for this story . . . .

What's happening with Harry and Fleur? I think I said in an author's note in the fourth or fifth chapter that Fleur is going to find that it's a lot harder to put epiphanies into practice and make them part of her life long term. Now she's finding that out.

Harry has never had, as a few of you have mentioned, proper framing from adults. So he really doesn't know how to handle this kind of thing. When Fleur started to try and frame life for Harry (boundaries, help, love, pushback, etc.), well, you've seen the result starting in chapter seven – when Fleur joined the Order. You've also seen the reaction when Sirius finally tries to do it concerning the Dark Arts.

Oh – and how do you all like Gabrielle? Isn't she that kid sister that's a completely adorable little terror that every just loves! Remember, she's a veela so the maturity she's showing in this chapter, coupled with the immaturity at times, is purposed, as she doesn't have the experience yet to know exactly how to be mature. I really hope I found the right balance.

From an early review of this chapter: So there was a question about whether Harry would already know how to fold clothes because of the Dursleys. My answer, is no. In the first four books, it's not mentioned (though it could very well be assumed he did). However, I'm taking the line that, that since they're so stuck on status, they got most of their clothes dry-cleaned and the stuff they didn't, they wouldn't want a filthy wizard touching it. So instead, he got the dirty jobs, and the cooking jobs, etc. Did I think about this before I read the review? Nope! But I think it works. (thanks Anonymous).

NEXT CHAPTER – We finally get to learn why Krum was speaking with a German accent! I really hope you all like that part of the back-story as much as I do – though I promise I won't bore you all with it like I did the veela history.

ON TO REVIEWS—

Nicks224 – Good, I like how the father turned out especially. I promise, you'll see the Bulgarian teacher again.

Mike/SableCold – Yes, that is exactly who it was. I am pleasantly surprised that others know about the book. Now, if I wanted to take

this into a crack!fic (which I won't), could you imagine bringing him and Red-Cell into the story? Heck, even sending Harry over to train with them?

jedipranks – we talked via PM, but I wanted to thank you publically for catching the "Obliviate – Obliterate" mix-up. Yeah, there's just a slight difference! Also, for catching the \* when I forgot to include the footnote for it.

Quantum Cat – Sometimes it is, but other times, we just get too much tunnel vision and can't think outside the box, or the maze. Each of the Champions were used to doing things alone – three seekers and a veela. So asking for help, was never the first thing on their mind.

Heliosion– laughing out loud at the Texas Chainsaw Massacre reference. There are a number of OCs coming, Paige isn't the only one. But don't worry, I won't lose track of who's who, character development, or who the story is about. Every character is involved to push the plot forward in their own special way, within their own set of abilities – and no, none of them are superman/woman!

ManlyMonk – Keep on reading, I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

J31415 (and others concerned with character development) – Hopefully now you're seeing what I've done. In my experience, this is more real to life, where someone makes massive steps in a short time, then snaps back into what they were for a while, then has to fight to get back out of it.

- for everyone wondering about resolving conflict quickly – As I said in the note to J31415, hopefully now you see why I've done what I did. I needed the foundational conflict resolved to set the stage for the languishing conflict – and to solidify the relationship, or it just wouldn't have felt real to me for those two to fight to stay together throughout the story. It just wouldn't have made sense. I hope it worked, but please leave me feedback if it didn't. That's how I learn.

PLEASE LEAVE A REVIEW! It is really nice opening up my email and seeing that people have thought enough about the fic to discuss it, or liked it enough to review it.

BTW – I just realized that the 4th of last month was one year since I started writing fanfic (or, writing fiction in general). I do think I've found a new love!

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